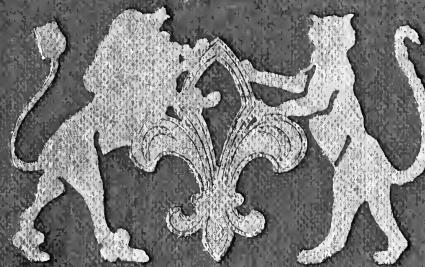


FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE



THE ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE
THE POODLE OF MONSIEUR GAILLARD
THE RECRUDESCENCE OF MADAME VIC
MADAME JOLICOEUR'S CAT
A CONSOLATE GIANTESS

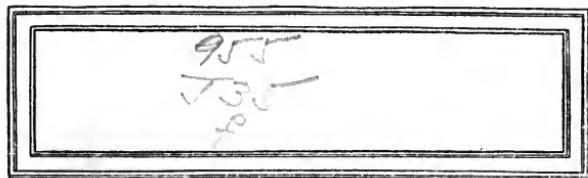
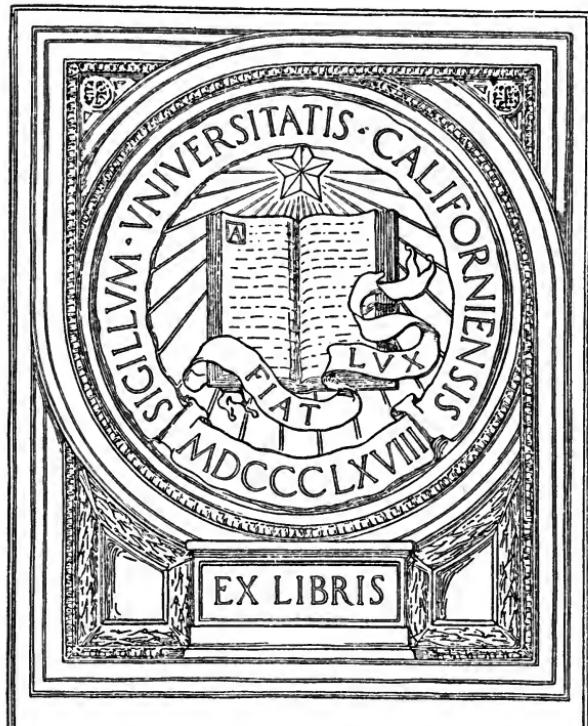


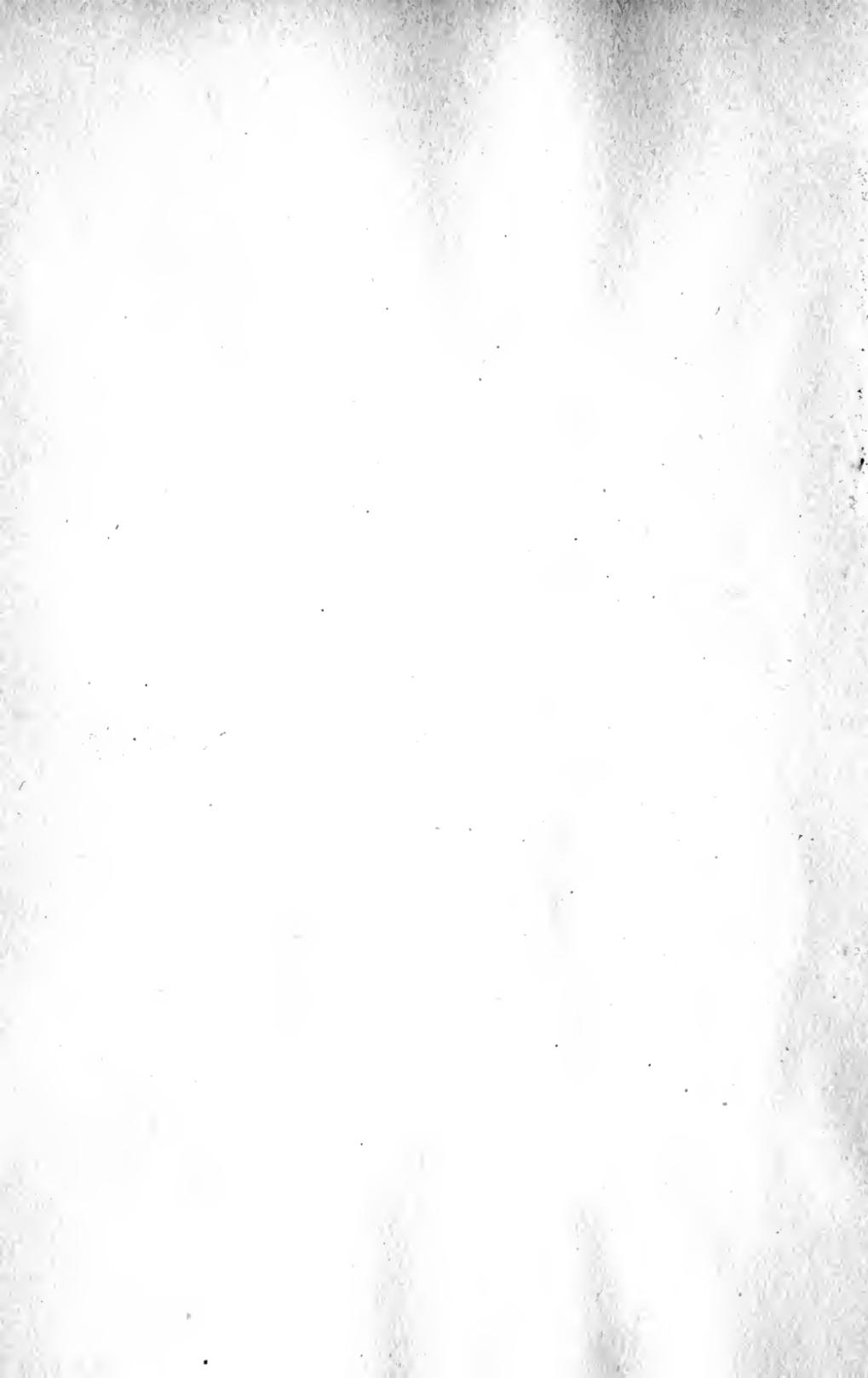
THOMAS A JANVIER

If thou be borrowed by a friend,
Right welcome shall he be
To read, to study, *not to lend*,
But to return to me;
Not that imparted knowledge doth
Diminish learning's store,
But books I find, if often lent,
Return to me no more.

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Mr. P. Hartley.





FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

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ELIZABETH SHIPPEN GREEN

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"THOU SHALT HAVE THEM ALL, ANGÈLE"

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE



THE ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE
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THE RECRUDESCENCE OF MADAME VIC
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A CONSOLATE GIANTESS

BY

THOMAS A. JANVIER
"

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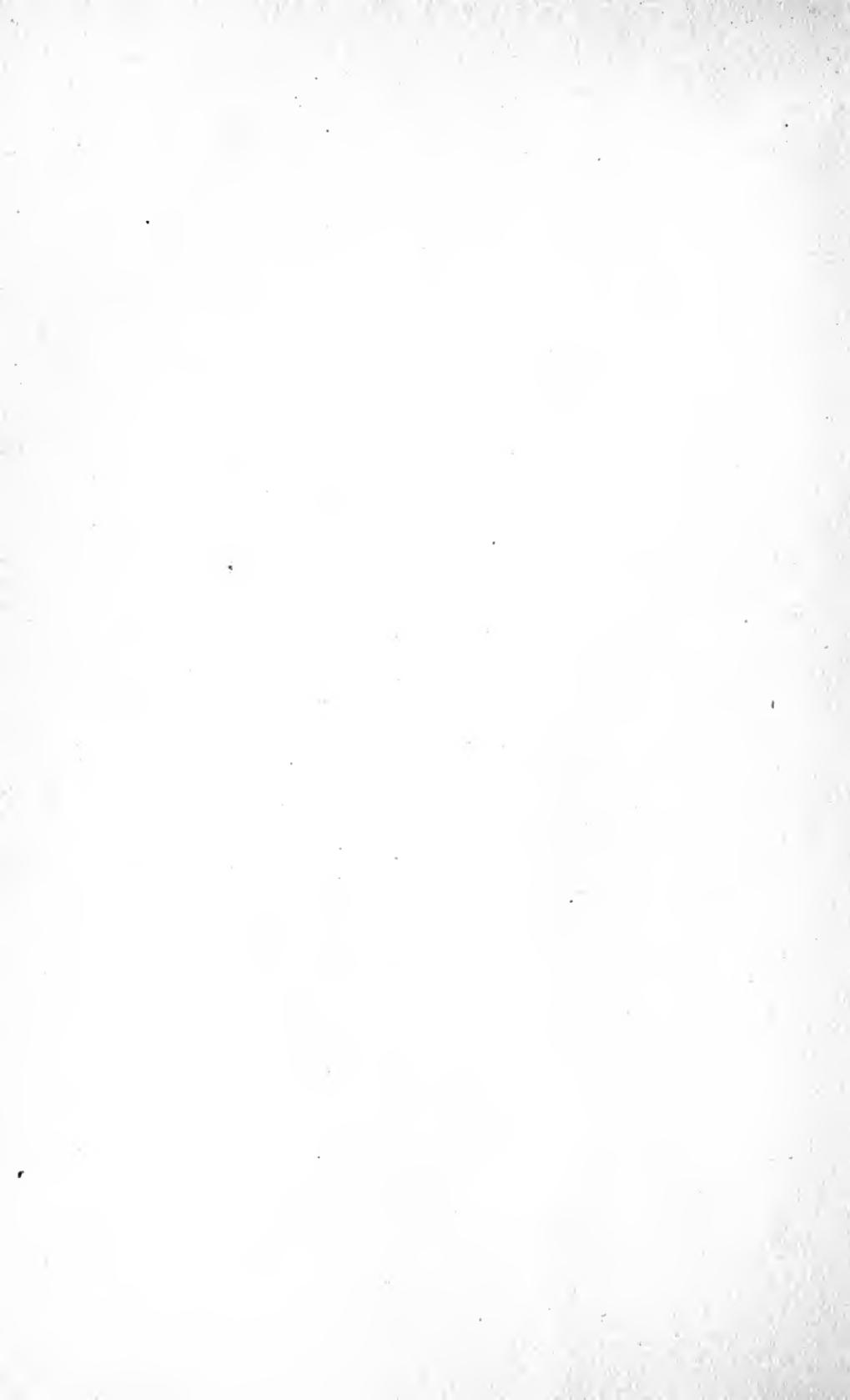
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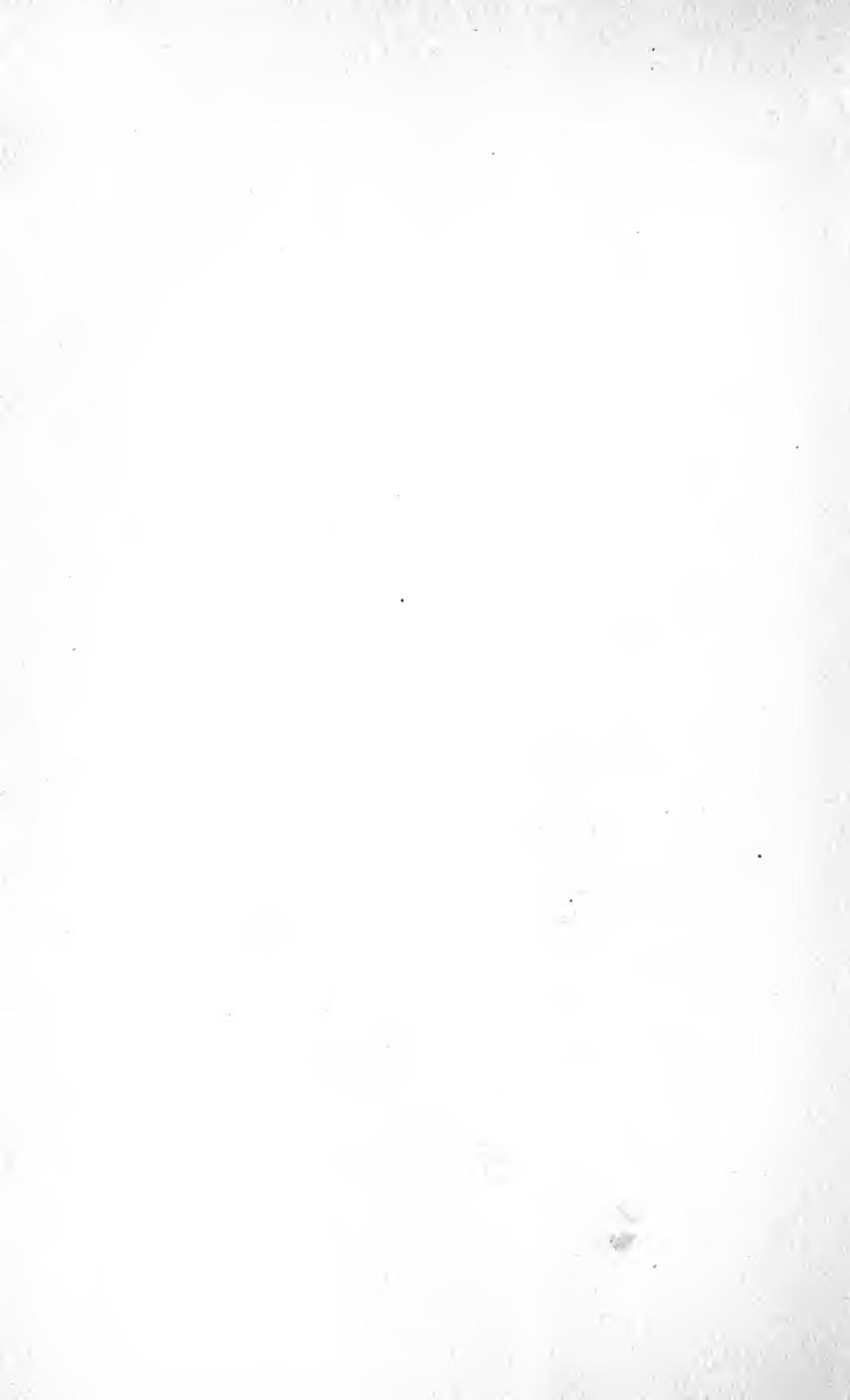
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THE ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

THE ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

I

"MONSIEUR then is prepared to deny everything, all entire?"

Monsieur was not prepared to deny everything, either all entire or sectionally. He was in narrow shoes. Therefore he temporized. For some seconds he stirred his coffee with a diligence—precisely as though Marie's words, actually spoken in a voice high-pitched and penetrating, had been inaudible. Then he looked up at her—precisely as though she had entered the room at that very moment—and said suavely: "Another glass of crème de menthe, if you please, Marie—and I beg that this time the morsels of ice may not be of the magnitude of hills."

Marie neither stirred nor answered.

"Let the ice, I say," Monsieur Alphonse continued, still playing for time, and also for diversion, "be not fragments of the dimensions of icebergs. Age is setting its harsh grasp upon thee, Marie. Thou art becoming careless. It is

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not alone my crème de menthe that is atrocious this evening. The soufflet also was a scandal. It had the heaviness of a bad dream!"

This unfair thrust almost was a touch. Marie's lips trembled and partly opened. Had they fully opened—in violent refutation of the calumny put upon her soufflet, which had been figuratively as well as literally an inspiration—all would have been lost. By a series of masterly manœuvres she had driven Monsieur Alphonse from one ill-defended position to another until she had him fairly in the open. Her demand for a general denial was much the same as a home-driven charge of cavalry upon a badly formed square. A diversion would have been fatal to the success of her attack. She realized this fact—and by an effort of will little short of heroic closed her lips firmly upon her unspoken words. When her lips did open, it was to repeat her charge upon the enemy's wavering square.

"Monsieur then is prepared, I say, to deny everything: to deny that none of these so-called accidents—every one of which, he will observe, has caused Madame Bellarmine to trespass upon our premises—has been the result of anything but chance?"

"I asked thee for another glass of crème de menthe, Marie."

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"He would have me believe, for example, that the falling of the wall was an accident?"

"Walls are not eternal. It was a very old wall."

"And the pruning of the overhanging tree?"

"Common courtesy required that permission should be obtained in that matter."

"And the pursuit of the cat—which has occurred no less than three times?"

"Cats are animals of a vagrant nature. Only strong chains would restrain Madame Bellarmine's cat from coming upon my land."

"That I admit freely! I would admit as much of Madame Bellarmine herself."

"Have a care, Marie!"

"And to omit the remainder of these scandals and to come to the immediate present, Monsieur is prepared to deny that this very evening Madame Bellarmine had the effrontery to beg from him our choicest roses, and that he pressed them—thousands of them!—eagerly into her outstretched hands?"

Monsieur Alphonse's attempt at a diversion having been unsuccessful, the situation remained unchanged. He was not prepared, I repeat, to deny everything; he even was prepared—if Marie fairly made a rat in a corner of him—to brazen the whole thing through. On the other

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hand, if a little judicious denying would relax the tension of a disagreeably tense situation, he was willing, within reason, to do his possible to ease the strain. Therefore he said, speaking with a guarded accuracy: "I deny that Madame Bellarmine begged me for my roses. I deny that I pressed thousands of them eagerly into her outstretched hands."

"Monsieur does not deny, I observe," Marie answered coldly, "that Madame Bellarmine carried away with her in her inverted parasol—as I saw with my own eyes—enough of our roses to ransom a dozen queens. Perhaps Monsieur will explain," she added, still more coldly, "by what fresh 'accident' those roses came to be in Madame Bellarmine's parasol?"

Monsieur Alphonse raised his empty glass and regarded it with an air of exaggerated longing. As Marie remained impassive, he set it down again with an exaggerated sigh. Then he said, plaintively: "Marie, in one more moment—at the most, in two more moments—I shall perish in torments, here before thy eyes, of thirst and indigestion! Hast thou no bowels?"

Brushing aside with a gesture of disdain Monsieur Alphonse's avowed intention to perish before her eyes in dual torments, and absolutely ignoring his irrelevant digression into her per-

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

sonal anatomy, Marie observed with a frost-nipped politeness: "I beg Monsieur's pardon. Monsieur was about to explain?"

Monsieur Alphonse leaned back in his chair and sighed again—this time with an air of exaggerated fatigue. "Thou art wearying, Marie—as wearying as a breadless day! The explanation that thou demandest with such unseemly insistence is of a childish simplicity. I make it to thee only for the sake of peace. Listen, then. What happened was this—precisely this: I was cutting roses from the jacqueminot in the corner—the tree that overhangs the outer wall. I was cutting those roses which grew upon the highest branches. To reach them I was compelled to stand upon the step-ladder's very top. My position was one of extreme peril. At any moment I was liable to fall. Had I fallen from that giddy height I assuredly should have dashed out my brains. Think of it, Marie! Thou wouldst have gone into the garden in search of thy old master, and thou wouldst have found his cold—"

"But Monsieur did *not* fall," Marie interrupted.

"God be thanked, no! But, being in such imminent danger, it is not surprising that my hands trembled; that two, that three, that perhaps even half a dozen roses slipped from the shears and fell outward upon the road."

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"Ah! And Madame Bellarmine at that moment falling also precisely upon the road—"

"Peace, Marie! The roses fell, I repeat, into the common highway. It was not my intention, of course, to suffer them to remain there. It was my intention"—to do Monsieur Alphonse justice, it is only fair to state that he here hesitated a little—"it was my intention, I say, when I had finished cutting my roses, and had descended in safety from that perilous height, to go out by the gate (which, as thou knowest, is quite at the other end of the garden) and reclaim them. Circumstances arose, however, which made that course impossible for me. While I still continued to cut roses, while the roses which had escaped from me still lay where they had fallen, Madame Bellarmine chanced to come up the roadway—approaching from the town."

"*Chanced to come up the roadway!*" Marie echoed in a tone witheringly scornful; and added: "Now I have the whole matter. Now I understand why Monsieur spent the whole of the hot afternoon in the 'Robinson.' It was admirable, the 'Robinson,' for his purposes. From there in the tree-top one sees perfectly the road leading up the hillside from Nimes." Marie paused for a moment, and then continued still more

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

scornfully: "But I interrupt Monsieur's narrative. Monsieur was cutting roses with such skill that hundreds of them fell into the roadway. While he was so engaged, Madame Bellarmine 'chanced'—positively, it was a miracle!—also to fall into the roadway, no doubt dropping from the clouds! Will Monsieur do me the favor to continue his interesting tale?"

"It is because of thy age and thy infirmities, Marie, that I suffer thee to wag thy tongue thus loosely. There is nothing more to tell thee. Most naturally, finding some roses lying in the dust of the public highway, Madame Bellarmine took possession of them—as thou, in like circumstances, wouldst have done thyself, Marie. She picked them up, I say, and went onward with them to her home. There, that is the whole of this matter about which thou hast raised such a tempest. That, I say, is the whole.

"And now, thy perverse curiosity being satisfied, perhaps thou wilt have the goodness to bring me the crème de menthe that I pine for. As to the ice, I repeat my injunction: Let the morsels be something less in magnitude than the whole round world!"

"Monsieur shall be served in a moment," Marie replied with a frigidity that quite put the ice out of countenance—and left the room with

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

the haughtily erect bearing of a conscript in his second year.

II

Actually, the exhibition of fact on the part of Monsieur Alphonse, to put the matter delicately, had been inadequate. His statement, with certain exceptions, had been a truthful statement; but his qualifying reservations distinctly had impaired its truthfulness as a whole. Yet his eliminative unveracity, if I so may term it, must not be taken too seriously nor regarded too harshly, as though destitute of all excuse. Much may be forgiven a young lover who gives the coasts of truth an offing in order to guard the treasured secret of his love. Very reasonably, therefore, much more may be forgiven—even so far a run to seaward as to drop the coasts of truth quite below the horizon—in the case of a lover who is rising forty, who is a recluse, and who is a professional philosopher of the Positivist School: which, precisely, was the case of Monsieur Alphonse. What really had happened was this:

In the early afternoon, having finished his excellent breakfast, Monsieur Alphonse had ascended to the “Robinson” with his cigarette-

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

case in one pocket of his flannel jacket and in the other pocket a volume of Comte. Absolutely, his only intention was to study an obscure passage in the writings of that philosopher and to smoke. The "Robinson" being circular, he might have seated himself with his back to any one of the thirty-two points of the compass. Chance—directed by the fall of the sunlight through the branches—led him to seat himself with his back to the southeast. Of necessity, therefore, he faced toward the northwest—that is to say, toward the Villa Prentegarde. Even Marie, had these facts been presented to her consideration, must have admitted that nothing more than accident thus had placed him in a position which in a manner compelled him to overlook Madame Bellarmine's abode.

Assuredly, then, it was no fault of Monsieur Alphonse's that he could not glance over the top of his book—while he wrestled mentally with the great Positivist's entangled concepts—without looking straight at the piquant villa, not three hundred yards distant, in which dwelt the most bewilderingly delightful widow in the whole of Languedoc. On the other hand, a student of Comte (remembering Madame de Vaux) might have had enough mere common sense to know that philosophy would be shattered into a thou-

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

sand fragments when—as presently happened—that ecstatic widow, arrayed in a ravishing walking-costume, came out from her own doorway and stood upon her own terrace while she drew on her gloves.

At that crisis moment it was that Monsieur Alphonse entered upon the broad path leading to perdition. Instead of removing Madame Bellarmine from his field of vision (by shifting his seat to any one of the sixteen points of the compass available for that purpose) and addressing himself to Comte with resolution, he removed Comte from his field of vision (by laying that eminent philosopher face downward on the seat beside him) and with a resolution that in reality was a perverted form of weakness addressed himself wholly to Madame Bellarmine. Really, though, something may be said in excuse for him. Between the hair-splitting of such an overpositive Positivist and the heart-splitting of such a widow—a dream of a widow, all in pearl-grey silk of a softness, wearing a wide-brimmed straw hat turned up with a pearl-grey feather. . . . Ah well, no philosopher, least of all a French philosopher, forced to make choice between such conflicting concepts, could be expected to forget that first of all he was a man!

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

Having drawn on her gloves, Madame Bellarmine opened and raised a pearl-grey lace-trimmed parasol. Held upon her shoulder, inclined backward, it gave the finishing touch to her costume: much as an aureole gives the finishing touch to the lighter costume of a very chic saint. Probably Madame Bellarmine would have resented one-half of that simile. Assuredly, had she been compelled to choose between being a saint and being chic, she would have chosen to be—not a saint. And that again is natural: seeing that Madame Bellarmine was all of seven-and-thirty, and of an experience and soul and body of the Midi. They are gay, down there. They take life cheerfully. It is in the bleak North—where chill mists are, and the sun is forgotten—that you will find the sad folk who look upon life as a discipline and who sit about moping over their souls.

The cigarette that Monsieur Alphonse was smoking went out unnoticed—as unnoticed as had been the extinguishment of his philosophy. Hidden among the branches, yet seeing clearly through the leafy rifts, he watched Madame Bellarmine with a longing watchfulness that set his heart to beating faster and that made his breathing irregular and short. For a few moments he lost sight of her, as she disappeared

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around the corner of the house on her way to the gate. Then he saw her again, as she reappeared in the narrow lane—which led down the hill-side, between high stone walls, past his own garden and onward and downward until it came to the bridge across the Torrent, and so to the streets of Nimes.

Evidently, she was on her way to the city. It was a long walk and a hot walk to be taking at that hour of a summer day; and the hotter because the high stone walls shut off what little air was stirring and made the lane not unlike the fiery furnace frequented by Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego. Monsieur Alphonse was lost in wonder that Madame Bellarmine should set herself in rivalry with those Scriptural salamanders—until he remembered that the fête of the Convent of Sainte Polentaine was to be celebrated that afternoon, and so had her defiance of thermic conditions explained.

That is a fête of much social importance in Nimes. To miss it is to lose caste. Also, it is interesting and delightful. You walk in the garden of the convent. You see prizes given to little girls in white frocks. You eat little cakes. In a word, it is a festival at once chaste and discreetly gay. That Madame Bellarmine should take part in it—even at the cost of a

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

grilling—was most reasonable. To be of that festival argues that one is known.

As he watched Madame Bellarmine descending the lane toward him, passing close beneath him, going on downward away from him, Monsieur Alphonse regretted keenly that he had elected to be a recluse. He was filled with the thrilling thought that had he accepted his invitation to the *fête*—it was sent to him regularly, and he regularly acknowledged it by a contribution—he might at that moment have been walking down that hillside in that enchanting widow's company. More—he might have gone on with her to the convent; he might have sat blissfully beside her while the little white-frocked girls received their prizes; he might even have walked with her in the garden and eaten with her the little cakes! Gloom settled upon his soul. He heaved wearily a deep-drawn sigh.

Madame Bellarmine became a pearl-grey speck in the distance. She was quite at the foot of the hillside. For a moment the pearl-grey speck stood out distinctly against the dark parapet of the stone bridge that spans the Torrent. (The Torrent justifies its name when the rains come. At other seasons there flows in its grass-grown bed only a gentle current of linen-bleaching blanchisseuses and bleaching clothes.)

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

Then, beyond the bridge, the speck became a mere whitish blur against the sun-bright houses—that passed onward into the Rue de l'Abattoir and so disappeared.

With another sigh, even more deeply drawn than the first one, Monsieur Alphonse lighted a fresh cigarette and essayed to resume his study of Positive philosophy. On the page that he turned to he read:

“Having regard to the general relation between the affective faculties, we have in effect recognized that the necessary preponderance of these in the altogether of our nature is nevertheless less pronounced in man than in any other animal, and that a certain degree of spontaneous speculative activity constitutes the principal cerebral attribute of humanity, as well as the first source of the profoundly incised character of our social organism. Now, under this aspect, one cannot seriously contest to-day the evident relative inferiority of woman: who is unfitted, in a way very different from man, to the indispensable continuity, as well as to the high intensity, of mental work—either because of the lesser intrinsic force of her intelligence or because of her more lively moral and physical susceptibilities, so antipathetic to every abstraction and to every truly scientific contention.

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Putting the sexes on a parity—even in the fine arts, and with the concourse of the most favorable circumstances—the most decisive experience always eminently has confirmed this irrefutable organic subalternity of the feminine genius, in spite of the amiable characteristics which ordinarily distinguish its brilliant and graceful compositions.”

This was more than Monsieur Alphonse could stand. Uttering an exclamation that no philosopher should utter, and giving way to a violent emotion that was subversive of every philosophical principle, he sprang angrily to his feet—and sent Monsieur Comte flying over the railing of the “Robinson” in a fluttering crash to the ground. The mere man had triumphed. Philosophy was routed down the whole line!

III

Passion having conquered reason, and a return to his studies—even had he desired such return—being precluded by the fact that the outraged Comte lay hidden, forty feet below him, among the cucumber vines, Monsieur Alphonse gave himself unreservedly to tobacco and to tender thoughts. In part, Marie’s shrewd inference had been well founded: he did spend the whole

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

of the hot afternoon in the “Robinson”—but less in consciously watching and waiting for Madame Bellarmine’s coming than in dreaming dreams of which Madame Bellarmine was the soul.

Yet was his dreaming not that of a mere ordinary lover. As became a professional philosopher, he set himself to formulate, to present, to argue, and to decide upon his own candidature to beatification: ignoring, however—while thus assembling in his own person the major functionaries, and while thus assuming one of the most important functions, of the Congregation of Rites—the rather important detail that one-half of the equities in interest were outside of the jurisdiction of the court.

In his rôle of *promotor fidei*, vulgarly known as the devil’s advocate, he urged that he was more than forty years old, a celibate by choice (even though his choice had not been wholly voluntary), a philosopher by conviction, and a recluse who had agreed with himself (even though unwillingly) to find in his books and in his roses the world well lost. This was a strong presentation of the case against matrimony; so strong that it seemed to relegate pearl-grey widows not only beyond the pale of his own cognizance, but beyond the limits of the solar system.

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

However, in his rôle of postulator, he argued on the other side not less convincingly. A man approaching middle life, a man of good family, of good fortune, with an honorable name to maintain and to perpetuate—surely such a man, whatever might be his personal likes or dislikes, owed duties to society and to the state which might not lightly be set aside. Was not the first and the highest of these duties precisely matrimony?

This was putting the case, Monsieur Alphonse reflected with satisfaction, as a philosopher should put it. Love, passion, personal inclination were eliminated from the argument with as handsome a disregard of those irrelevant yet insidious quantities as could have been exhibited by the great Comte himself. Nor was his satisfaction lessened by the fact that, as a philosopher, he was compelled to admit, in reply to his own question, that of the various duties owed by a person of his position to the state and to society matrimony undoubtedly was the highest and the first. It was no fault of his, he farther reflected, that the conclusions of philosophy fitted to a hair his conclusions as a lover and a man.

Then the devil's advocate took up the case again, asking Monsieur Alphonse to answer

FROM THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

honestly what was likely to become of "Considerations upon the Destiny of Humanity"—his great work, for which the ages had been waiting—if he rashly essayed to mingle his exposition of superbly profound theories touching the future of the human race with its mere propagation? What probability was there, the devil's advocate asked coldly, should he yield himself weakly to the distractions of a wife and family, that his *magnum opus* ever would be given to the world?

This was a disheartening question. As he turned it over in the recesses of his inner consciousness his spirits fell: until the postulator cheered him again by answering boldly that many notable examples might be cited of married philosophers—even of disastrously married philosophers, as in the case of the great Comte himself—whose philosophy had been of a strength and of a soundness that had sent it ringing enduringly down the corridors of time. . . . And so the devil's advocate and the postulator continued to hammer each other briskly while the afternoon wore away.

When love and reason thus are at points, struggling for supremacy, time passes with an amazing swiftness. All the while that the head and the heart of Monsieur Alphonse were

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

lunging at each other the sun was galloping westward—widening the narrow shadows and sending them flying down the hillside closer and closer to the glaring white walls of the houses of Nimes. Toward those houses, in spite of his preoccupation, he gazed steadfastly; his subconsciousness being keenly interested in the flying shadows because of the certainty that Madame Bellarmine would emerge from among the glaring white houses, and would begin her ascent of the hillside, a little while before the sun went down in splendor behind the Cévennes.

At last there came a gentle rustling of the leaves about him as a puff of air played among them—the advance-guard of the cool wind of evening that presently would draw down steadily from the high garrigues. At the same instant Monsieur Alphonse gave a start and heaved a quickly drawn sigh: as he saw detach itself from the white houses and advance toward the Torrent a little whitish blur. During some moments he watched it intently, breathing hard. Then he sighed restfully: as the whitish blur, being defined against the parapet of the bridge, became a pearl-grey speck surmounted by a smaller speck that undoubtedly was a parasol!

In the crises of our lives our actions are prompted by thoughts so swiftly formed that

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we cannot follow them. We usually term this process inspiration. That is a term not recognized by philosophy. But Monsieur Alphonse, both then and subsequently, regarded as an inspiration the thought which in that pregnant instant took form in his brain. In a single flash of supreme intelligence an effective plan of campaign became clear to him; and so distinctly that he set about executing it with a coolness curiously at odds with the ardor in which it was conceived.

Without haste—he had a good twenty minutes at his disposal—but with strong determination, he descended from the “Robinson” and went to the tool-house in which were kept the step-ladder and the long-handled shears. The path that he followed passed beside the bed of cucumbers. Close at his feet lay the volume of Comte that he had cast from him into space disdainfully. So far from rescuing the great philosopher from his humiliating resting-place among ignoble vegetables—the book, half open, with crushed leaves, was a pitiable object—Monsieur Alphonse did violence to the principles of half a lifetime by turning aside and viciously kicking Monsieur Comte still deeper among the vines!

His time was ample for his purposes. Long

ROSES OF MONSIEUR ALPHONSE

before Madame Bellarmine had accomplished a third of the ascent—in all the unconsciousness of a dove approaching the snare of the fowler—he had planted his ambuscading step-ladder against the garden wall, close beside the rose-bush, and had mounted upon it shears in hand. The jacqueminot was of a hugeness. It rose above the wall high and thick, a tree rather than a bush, its great mass of greenery everywhere made glorious by crimson bloom. As he had placed himself, he was quite hidden from any person coming up the stone-walled lane until that person was directly beneath him and in front of him; but by snipping away a few of the clustered leaves he cleared a peep-hole through which he commanded a view of the lane to its first turning, a hundred yards or so away.

It was feverish work standing there on the step-ladder with his eyes fixed on the turn of the wall! Still more feverish was the moment when, fluttering around the turn, he caught a glimpse of a pearl-grey skirt—and an instant later saw the entire garment, and above it the pearl-grey parasol! Being behind the parasol—on which the red sun-rays streaming down the lane cast a ruddy glow that changed the pearl-grey to a cool crimson—the upper portion of Madame Bellarmine's person was hidden from

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him. And, also, that ravishing accessory to her ravishing costume hid the way in front of her from Madame Bellarmine's eyes—a fact that exactly fitted in with his plan. His whole body quivered as he extended the long-handled shears and cut quickly a half-dozen roses—which fell precisely in her path. Then he stood waiting, breathless, expectant, while she slowly came up the lane toward him in the ruddy glow!

IV

Monsieur Alphonse's inspired plan worked to a miracle. Not until the roses were at Madame Bellarmine's very feet did she see them. Directly beneath him she stopped short, bending over them with a little cry of delight. It was all that he had hoped for, and his emotion so stirred him that the shears clicked together in his trembling hand. At the sound, slight but incisive, she raised her head quickly and looked upward. The warm walk had brought an adorable color into her face. That color became deeper, and still more adorable, as her exceptionally bright black eyes met full with Monsieur Alphonse's eyes—which also chanced to be exceptionally bright just then—at a range of something less than two yards.

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The encounter, in its realized expectation and in its utter unexpectedness, was startling on both sides. The gentleman, long unused in his philosophic reclusion to such passages, forgot even to bow. The lady, who had not lived wholly the life of a recluse, and who made no pretensions to being a philosopher, was the first to recover herself. "Monsieur is most wasteful of his superb roses," she said politely, and at the same time smiled an altogether entrancing smile.

Monsieur Alphonse pulled himself together. "It is no waste of my poor roses," he said gallantly, "that good chance has laid them at Madame's feet." And with that—allowing for his insecure position on the top of the step-ladder—he made Madame Bellarmine a handsome bow.

"To take these roses for my own," she continued, "would be only a shade less than robbery; but, also, to take them would be, perhaps, to teach Monsieur a salutary lesson. His carelessness—I remember that it was one of his youthful characteristics—seems to have increased with his years. Yes, I perceive that to take them will be to teach him a useful lesson—therefore I shall rob him for his own good." And with these words she stooped and collected the roses, quite with the air of one who enforces a severe

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but just law. Standing erect again, in the red sun-rays, the mass of crimson roses added a note of strong color to her pearl-grey effect that was nothing short of maddening—a fact of which Madame Bellarmine not impossibly was aware.

“Madame surprises me by the excellence of her memory! To be sure, she recalls only my faults. That, however, is a detail. Assuredly, her memory has improved quite in pace with the deterioration of my carelessness. It was not precisely what one would have called her strongest point some years—for example, twenty years—ago. I congratulate Madame upon the needed strength that has come to this—she will pardon me for calling it weak?—trait in her character.”

“I have been informed,” Madame Bellarmine replied, speaking in a tone of reflection, “that philosophy and courtesy have little in common. Monsieur convinces me that this generalization is sound. No doubt it is as a philosopher that he is good enough to discourse so pointedly upon the imperfections of my character and to refer so pointedly to my age. I must beg him to observe that my imperfections are as God gave them to me; and, also, that as yet my age is not excessive. For Monsieur’s philosophic frank-

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ness I owe him a thousand thanks!" The smile that accompanied Madame Bellarmine's words left little sting in them; however, as they thus came to a recover, she distinctly had the better of the first passage of arms.

Precisely because she had the advantage she refrained from using it. On the contrary, she opened her guard. While Monsieur Alphonse maintained a hesitant silence she continued, still in a tone of reflection: "My memory is not so worthless as Monsieur's strictures upon it would imply. Let us take this very matter of roses. I remember clearly that some years—for example, twenty years—ago Monsieur's dominant passion was for roses, and—"

"No, my dominant passion was not for roses," Monsieur Alphonse struck in decisively; "it was for—"

—"and I perceive," Madame Bellarmine continued with a calm insistence that overbore the interruption, "that in that matter, notwithstanding his devotion to philosophy, he has remained unchanged. His roses are superb!"

"It is not *I* who have changed in any way," Monsieur Alphonse answered—with so marked an emphasis upon the pronoun as to imply that everything but himself in the whole habitable universe had gone whirling into chaos not once,

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but many times. “It is not *I* who have changed,” he repeated; “it is—”

“Circumstances,” Madame Bellarmine hastily interpolated; and added, in a tone of speculative inquiry: “As a philosopher, Monsieur no doubt is interested in the mutability of circumstances? I am not surprised. Truly, the weighing of cause and effect, the analysis of the ebb and flow of human action, must be profoundly attractive to the philosophic mind. Urged by desire, swayed by opportunity, we all—” She broke off suddenly into a delightful laugh. “Positively, I am stealing Monsieur’s thunder as well as his roses! I am talking as though I were a philosopher myself! Monsieur must forgive my insolent temerity and my double dishonesty. I am compelled to fly from him in confusion. I wish him a very good night.”

With these words, Madame Bellarmine bowed gracefully and took a slow step or two up the lane. That she was not overtaxing her flying powers was obvious, as was also the fact that she had her confusion well in hand.

The earnest and very eager look in Monsieur Alphonse’s eyes, that had accompanied his assertion of his own stability and its implied reflection upon stabilities in general, died out a little as he listened to Madame Bellarmine’s dissertation

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upon philosophy; but it revived again as her discourse ended and she began what she was pleased to term her flight.

“Stop!” he cried. “Surely thou wilt—”

Madame Bellarmine did stop—accomplishing that feat in statics without any very extravagant outlay of energy—and at the same time imposed silence upon him by a commanding wave of her hand.

“I venture,” she said, in a tone of preceptorial kindness, “to correct Monsieur’s grammar in two particulars: His imperative verb is too imperative to match with the requirements of politeness; and, also, his use of the too familiar pronoun is not precisely in good taste. He will pardon my frankness, I am sure—since he must know that little slips of this nature are set right most effectively by correcting them as they occur.” She paused long enough to observe the effect upon Monsieur Alphonse of her exposition of grammatical niceties—an effect that distinctly was disconcerting—but not long enough to give him an opportunity to reply. “Monsieur was about to say, I infer,” she continued, “that surely I would accept from him, in addition to the roses which I have stolen, one more rose as a free gift—in proof that for my theft, and for my venturing to talk philosophy to him, he bears me no ill-will.”

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Monsieur Alphonse's troubled look changed to a radiant look, as he answered eagerly: "Thou shalt have them all, Angèle. Hold here thy parasol."

"In the matter of grammar," Madame Bellarmine observed, "Monsieur is incorrigible. His misuse of personal pronouns positively is exemplary, and now he also is taking extreme liberties with personal nouns." But she came beneath the out-hanging branches and held up to receive the falling roses her inverted parasol.

Her wide sleeves fell back to her elbows, leaving bare a heavenly pair of rounded arms. Monsieur Alphonse snipped long-stemmed roses slowly. Looking down at those arms, and at her upturned face, lighted warmly by the last of the red sun-rays, he had the irrational desire to remain upon his step-ladder looking down at her and cutting roses for her through all the remainder of his days. Nor did Madame Bellarmine manifest any overt eagerness to have the rose-cutting come to an end. Neither of them spoke. The only sound, there in the red sunlight, was the soft rustle of the falling roses and the clicking of the shears.

Actually, it was the failure of the supply of roses which closed this pretty passage. "That is the last," said Monsieur Alphonse regret-

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fully—and would have been thankful for the intervention of Saint Elizabeth with a miracle to deck the bush anew. As he spoke, and so ended the long silence, he sighed. He had the feeling of one waking slowly from a happy dream. Madame Bellarmine also sighed, as though she too were coming back from dream-land. Perhaps there had been for each of them a touch of hypnotism in the brightness of the other's eyes. Over the lady's eyes there seemed to come suddenly a veil of softness. It may have been only a change in the effect of light: at that moment the sun dropped down behind the Cévennes.

Madame Bellarmine roused herself from her dreaming. "Heavens!" she cried. "The sun has set! I am a person wicked beyond words! Beginning by stealing a few of Monsieur's roses, I have gone on to what is much the same as stealing all of them; and I have kept Monsieur standing upon an outrageous step-ladder—utterly away from the improving influences of philosophy—through hours of his valuable time. If Monsieur were not truly a philosopher, and therefore superior to human passions, he would curse me for the robber and the beggar and the trifler that I am! But I am grateful—I am very grateful—for these roses which I have begged

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and stolen: and I regret only"—her tone had become serious and she spoke not quite steadily—"that with all the care that I shall give them they so soon must wither and die."

To do Madame Bellarmine justice, the opening that she thus gave to Monsieur Alphonse was not given intentionally. To assert that she regretted having given it would be, perhaps, to press the point too far.

"These roses may wither less quickly than did those others—the roses which I gave thee long ago," he said slowly; and added: "May I bring thee more, when these are gone?" There was a note of strong entreaty in his tone.

"Monsieur already has forgotten my correction of his grammar. His misuse of pronouns is shocking in the extreme!"

"Angèle!"

"And even more shocking is his misuse of nouns! As a friend, I advise Monsieur to give up temporarily the study of philosophy and to enter for a term the junior form of the Lycée."

"May I bring thee more of my roses?" Monsieur Alphonse persisted, speaking still more earnestly.

"But probably Monsieur would find associa-

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tion with very little boys disagreeable. Certainly, for a philosopher, his position at the Lycée would be anomalous."

"I beseech thee—"

"And, therefore, it remains that the task of correcting his errors must be undertaken by his friends. Being one of his friends, it is my duty to assist in this good work; and the fulfilment of my duty—since his errors, to be corrected, must be observed—necessarily involves occasional conversations with him. If Monsieur sees fit to recompense me with roses for the trouble that his tuition will give me—let us say at the rate of one rose for each corrected slip—I shall be charmed to receive them. I have a passion for roses, as Monsieur knows. He is at liberty to begin his course of instruction at his convenience. I am at his disposition on almost any afternoon."

"For example, to-morrow?"

"But yes. For example, to-morrow. In treating so extreme a case of retarded grammatical development it is well that time should not be lost. Again I thank Monsieur for his superb roses, and again I wish him good-night."

And then Madame Bellarmine really did carry into execution her previously announced, but temporarily restrained, intention to fly home-

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ward. Bearing her roses with her, she went onward up the lane.

v

Obviously, in his statement to Marie of the afternoon's occurrences Monsieur Alphonse had economized veracity. But again I say that much might be forgiven him for making so wide an offing from the coasts of truth. That Marie—who had no illusions—took so charitable a view of the matter is improbable. When she returned, presently, bringing a glass of crème de menthe in which the ice scrupulously had been reduced to minute fragments, she continued to bear herself with the haughty erectness of a second-year conscript, while her general demeanor was suggestive of a justly incensed elderly thunder-cloud lowering over the peaks of the Cévennes. "Monsieur is served," she said frigidly, and set the glass precisely before him with an exaggerated show of care.

Monsieur Alphonse raised the glass and sipped his crème de menthe with satisfaction. "I thank thee, Marie," he said. "There now is a probability that my life will be preserved. This is excellent. The ice is a miracle of fine-

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ness. An angel from heaven could not have prepared it with a greater skill."

Marie made no reply to this handsome compliment. She stood stiffly, with folded arms. Her silence was oppressive.

"In the matter of the soufflet," he resumed, continuing his effort to soften her severity, "I admit that I did thee great injustice. I was annoyed, and I spoke petulantly. It was a soufflet that might have emerged from a dream!"

So far from accepting Monsieur Alphonse's tendered olive branch in the spirit in which it was offered, Marie seized upon it only to pervert it cleverly into a weapon of offense. There was a biting quality in her tone—a tone that he knew and dreaded—as she answered: "So Monsieur, in effect, already has told me. 'As heavy as a bad dream' was his description of it. No doubt it was what he has declared it to be; and, also, no doubt Monsieur was quite right in adding that I have grown useless because I have grown old."

Actually, there was so much truth in this statement—although it had been made lightly, and without malice—that Monsieur Alphonse was altogether conscience-stricken. "Animal that I am!" he cried earnestly. "To think that I should have pained thee with my thoughtless

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words! I must beg thee to forgive me, my good Marie."

At that moment, however, the good Marie was in anything but a forgiving mood. To resume the simile of the hovering storm-cloud, Monsieur Alphonse's kindly apology was neither more nor less than a lightning-rod—that tempted the thunderbolts to descend.

"Yes," she continued, "as Monsieur truly says, I am but a useless old woman. It is high time that some light young widow should be called in to rule his household in my place. He remembers no longer how I have served him faithfully his whole life long; how I cared for him when he was a little boy; how I washed him and dressed him and combed his hair—"

"I distinctly remember thy combing my hair," Monsieur Alphonse put in with acerbity. "When in one of thy tempers, as now, it was thy habit to pull it till I cried!" Justly, he was nettled. Marie had mentioned no names, but her allusion to a light young widow was too obvious to be misconstrued.

"Monsieur's memory being so good, perhaps he remembers some other things—for example, what passed while he was doing his three years? However, in order to be any sort of a widow, one first must be some sort of a wife. And, also,

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what matters a little thing like a broken pledge between a boy of twenty and a girl of seventeen?"

"Silence, Marie! Thy words pass all bounds!" Monsieur Alphonse himself of a sudden had become a thunder-cloud. - But Marie, regardless of electrical conditions other than her own, paid no attention to his order and continued her discharge.

"And Monsieur—who gives away our superb roses as though they were cabbages—perhaps remembers another gift of roses that he made in that long-past time. It was I who carried his gift, and Monsieur—who in those days did not treat me as though I were a beast of the fields—confided to me its meaning. He sent it on the very morning that he went away to do his three years." Marie paused for a moment, and then added: "But they withered soon, those roses. They were quite dead, he will remember, when he came home on his second-year leave. And now, although he is of an age, and by this time should have acquired wisdom, he again is giving his roses to this same person—just as he gave them when he was a foolish boy! Oh, la, la!"

Having thus freed her mind, Marie stood with her hands on her hips awaiting the explosion

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which she confidently expected was about to occur. She even expected it with a grim gladness—being just then wholly in a battling mood. However, it did not occur. For some seconds Monsieur Alphonse was silent. Then he said, speaking without passion but in a tone of finality that barred appeal:

“Thou art an impossible old woman, Marie. For a long while I have tried to make a pleasantry of thy ill tempers, believing that even in the worst of them thou hadst no thought of real ill-will. But now we have got beyond the terms of pleasantry—it is quite time that we should part. Thou shalt go to thy nephew on the estate—it is the house in which thy father lived and in which thou wert born—and I shall see to it that thou hast thy little pension and that thou art well cared for there. But I advise thee—I very earnestly advise thee—to be more sparing with thy nephew than thou hast been with me of the rough side of thy tongue. He is not likely to try, as I have tried, to make a jest of it—that brave man! Now thou mayest leave me. It is my desire to be alone.”

Marie was awed into silence by the resolute manner of Monsieur Alphonse’s deliverance, but beyond silence her awe did not extend. In point of fact, the sentence passed upon her by

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way of punishment—that she should take her retreat, quite like an official of the government, and live upon a pension in the very place that she most loved—was one that only the occasion and the terms of its pronouncement distinguished from a reward. Precisely as a reward, she had been looking forward to it for years. Naturally, therefore, her bearing as she left the apartment was that of a technically defeated general who retires with his colors and his drums.

On the side of Monsieur Alphonse undoubtedly was substantial victory—but he had purchased it at a price! That he definitely had delivered himself from Marie's ill-tempered tyranny was a cause for rejoicing; but there was no cause for rejoicing in the reflection that he had won his freedom by the sacrifice of a cook whose cooking was inspired! The subject was too painful to dwell upon: he put it from him, and passed on to the consideration of other matters—a kaleidoscopic mingling of Positive philosophy, and step-ladders, and parasols filled with crimson roses, and very bright black eyes. The effect was of a brilliancy—but over it all was cast a sinister shadow by the memory, touched upon by Marie with such malignant coarseness, of those other roses which had withered in a long-past time. Therefore it was that Monsieur Alphonse chewed

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the cud of bitter fancies, as well as of sweet fancies, as he sat smoking more cigarettes than were good for him while the night wore on. In a mood of gloomy doubt, that put scandal upon his normal Positivism, he went at last to bed.

VI

In the flooding sunshine of early morning in the Midi somber thought is impossible. As Monsieur Alphonse sat at the little round table on the terrace and drank his coffee—served by Marie with a chill dignity—he had within him the elate feeling of a hero to whom the subduing of dragons is a pastime and to whom the conquest of giants is a matter of course. They are not half-hearted down there in the South. With them the tide always is at dead ebb or full flow. Usually it is at full flow.

His brave feeling held by him well as the day advanced—in spite of the fact that the idle hours went slowly. As to employing himself in his normal manner—that is to say, in ministering to his roses or in wrestling with some of the more abstruse phases of Positivism—it was quite out of the question. Rather, indeed, was he disposed to jettison his entire cargo of Positivism and have done with it for good and all! In-

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stead, therefore, of passing his morning in his garden in company with his roses or in his cabinet in company with Monsieur Comte, he betook himself to the "Robinson" to pass it in company with cigarettes and glowing thoughts.

As he approached the ladder that led upward to that retreat among the branches he perceived his late master lying forlornly among the cucumber vines—all the worse for the kick that had sent him deeper into them, and sadly bedraggled with dew. A snail of perverted tastes had attached itself to the volume. Monsieur Alphonse was not a believer in the Pythagorean Doctrine, but the fancy occurred to him that the soul which but lately had animated his own body—and which, having given place to a soul of a very different sort, certainly animated it no longer—had passed by transmigration into the body of that snail. The snail was quite welcome to it, he said to himself smilingly—and he even felt an inconsequent glow of gratitude to Pythagoras as he mounted to the seat in the tree-top whence he could overlook Madame Bellarmine's abode.

There, as he smoked his cigarettes, he continued to play with his fancy—applying his trained powers of analysis to the matter, and arriving at the conclusion that the soul of which

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the snail had become possessed had begun to loosen itself in readiness for transmigration precisely two months earlier: that is to say, on the very day of Madame Bellarmine's arrival at the Villa Prentegarde. For many years preceding that day, thanks to the philosophy that he had taken to at first medicinally and subsequently as an agreeable mental exercise, Madame Bellarmine had been to him only a memory that was held prisoned in the sealed chambers of his mind. When this memory had succeeded in escaping, as had happened now and then, the fact that he had no certain knowledge of her—that she merely existed, vague and unobtainable, out in the world somewhere—had helped him to catch it again and to put it back in ward. But this line of treatment had to be abandoned in a hurry when—suddenly ceasing to be remotely phantasmal, and also ceasing to be hopelessly unobtainable—she became an aggressively delightful reality at his very door. That was a situation far too vivid to be dealt with effectively in a philosophical and abstract way; and therefore, being deserted by—or, perhaps, deserting—his philosophy, he had dealt with it in the merely human fashion which of necessity had led on to the crisis that had arrived. And so, with a rather startling celerity—and also, as it

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seemed to him, with a nice appropriateness—his late soul had left him to find a more fitting habitation in the body of the snail. The fact will be observed, however, that Monsieur Alphonse, although bereft of the substance of his philosophy, retained its forms: a simple, every-day lover could not thus have weighed his passion so nicely, nor would he have been likely to reduce it to such terms.

His abstract reflections were ended abruptly by the concrete appearance of the subject of them. Clad in a loose white robe which suggested comfort, yet which was chic to a degree, Madame Bellarmine came out upon her own terrace and stood for some moments viewing with apparent approval the world at large. Then she nestled herself into a cushion-lined wicker chair, over which a wide-spreading sun-umbrella cast an agreeable shade. She had with her a yellow-covered book, but she did not read it. Presently a trim maid-servant brought out a great vase filled with crimson roses and placed it on a little table beside her—whereat the heart of Monsieur Alphonse gave a bound! The maid-servant having retired, she drew the roses closer to her and bent over them. It seemed to Monsieur Alphonse that she kissed them. Then she took from the vase a single rose

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and fastened it upon her breast. After that she sat quietly, her book lying unopened in her lap beneath her folded hands.

What more she did or did not do that morning was unseen by Monsieur Alphonse. Being a gallant gentleman, he recognized the fact that spying upon her in that way was outside the rules. By a mighty effort, he set his respect above his devotion and descended from the tree. It was a retreat quite as heroic as would have been his assault single-handed upon a battery of guns!

During the remainder of the morning he paced the walks of his garden with the wearying persistence of a wild animal resentful of captivity; and also, when breakfast-time came, manifested a captive wild animal's repugnance to food. Marie—whose ill temper had suffered amelioration, and who had cooked a breakfast for him that might have betrayed Saint Anthony—regarded with a lively concern his loss of appetite; until her feminine intuition prompted a keen guess at the cause of it, and so induced a fresh hardening of her heart. In her removal of the untouched dishes she exhibited the stately resentment of a battlemented tower.

The afternoon went better for him. He had occupation: first in cutting a basketful of roses

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superior to those of the Mexican miracle, and then in exchanging the garments suitable to the varied pursuits of rose-culture and of philosophy —of which the characteristics were great age and extreme shabbiness—for others more in keeping with the matter that he had in hand. In a way, there was a touch of pathos in the care that Monsieur Alphonse bestowed upon his dress. With it went a curious feeling that he was a boy of twenty again; and this feeling was all the more real to him because of the memories which were stirring, below the depth that had been reached by his philosophy, in certain deep chambers of his heart. He was a personable figure of a man when his dressing was ended; and not a man conspicuously superannuated. After all, one still has left some remnants of youthful vigor even at the age of forty-one.

VII

“I have the honor to avail myself of Madame’s offer to amend my imperfect grammatical education. I also have the pleasure to present to Madame her stipulated honorarium.” As he spoke these words Monsieur Alphonse bowed with a great propriety to Madame Bellarmine;

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and then, again bowing with a propriety, placed the basket of roses at her feet.

She was seated in the wicker chair, as he had seen her from the “Robinson” in the morning; but in place of the easy garment of white she wore a symphony in silk that had pearl-grey for its under-note, and for its over-note certain touches of crimson which culminated in the crimson rose upon her breast. In some other respects the effect had changed. The sun had moved so far westward that all the terrace was in shadow; the umbrella was gone from above her chair—in which silk cushions, also of a pearl-grey with crimson touches, made a nest for her; and the chair itself had been moved nearer to the white wall of the villa—perhaps not in total disregard of the artistic fact that under certain conditions, which there chanced to be realized, a white wall in shadow is a rather tellingly effective background. On the little table beside her stood the great vase filled with crimson roses—a tremendous dash of strong color that was as pleasing as it was bold. In front of her, below the terrace, lay the sun-bright, flower-filled garden; and beyond the garden — with Monsieur Alphonse’s own dwelling in the foreground—was the view down the olive-clad hillside to the gleaming white walls of the Nimes houses, and

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far away over the city to the chain of low mountains which there borders the eastern bank of the Rhône. The maid-servant who had introduced him into this little nook in paradise—a discreet person—had closed the door behind her as she retired into the villa. They were quite alone. Save their own voices, the only sound that broke the afternoon stillness was the loud humming among the flowers in the garden of honey-seeking bees.

Madame Bellarmine leaned forward in her chair and smiled graciously as he bowed and made his decorously formal speech—whereof the formality a little was qualified by the look that was in his eyes. However, she ignored his look and answered his words: “Monsieur’s grammar to-day is absolutely irreproachable. I congratulate him upon his so-marked improvement—although, of course, since he needs no correction, I must refuse the magnificent honorarium that he offers me. It would be quite of a piece with my theft of yesterday were I to accept as a gift that to which I am entitled only as a fee. Monsieur will do me the favor to be seated?”

With a polite gesture she placed at his disposition the one other chair upon the terrace—which stood quite on the other side of the little table

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and therefore was rather bleakly isolated. Fortunately it was so light a chair, being also of wicker, that he was able to move it to a more advantageous position without any very excessive outlay of strength. He did not venture to bring it nearer to her, being satisfied for the moment to place it in such a way that the table no longer intervened between them as a wall. Madame Bellarmine could not, in common politeness, make protest against his rearrangement of her furniture. It even is conceivable that she was not unfavorably impressed by the spirited promptness with which he thus carried the first of her outworks by assault.

"Surely thou wilt not refuse my roses?" he said entreatingly.

"My hopes for Monsieur's educational improvement," Madame Bellarmine replied with an air of melancholy, "already are blighted! Alas, in telling him that his grammar was irreproachable I was both precipitate and premature! To at least one of these superb roses—because of his slip in the use of pronouns—I now fairly am entitled," and she bent down over the basket. "But upon my faith," she continued, "they all are so beautiful that it is quite impossible to arrive at a choice!"

"Then take them all! And with them take—"

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"To produce roses of such magnificence, Monsieur must have given a great deal of his valuable time to a study of their cultivation," she put in hurriedly. "Almost as much, perhaps, as he has given to his study of philosophy?"

"More," Monsieur Alphonse answered dryly; and added: "Madame may remember that she herself had a liking for roses some years—for example, twenty years—ago; but I scarcely can expect her to remember that she then was good enough to encourage me to form a similar taste. It is a fact, however, that my liking for roses was an outgrowth of her own. Later, her likings changed. Mine did not." He paused, as though to afford opportunity for comment upon this statement. No comment being forthcoming, he continued: "Madame would be more correct, therefore, were she to note that more of what she is pleased to call my valuable time has been devoted to roses than to philosophy. The latter devotion, indeed, was the direct result of the former: since, as she may be interested in knowing, I essayed the study of philosophy because a certain one of my ventures in roses went wrong. Does Madame, by any chance—now that her memory so wondrously has improved—remember the ill-ending venture to which I refer?"

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Seemingly, Madame did not. Certainly, she made no reply. She sat deep back among her cushions, her head bent forward a little and her regard fixed not upon Monsieur Alphonse—although he was seated directly in front of her—but far beyond him, out over the sunny garden and the olive orchards and the gleaming city, upon the distant low mountains bordering the Rhône. He could not even be certain that she was listening to him. It was possible that she was listening to the bees—their humming, in that alert silence, was sounding in his own ears almost as the roll of far-off drums. Her eyes—perhaps because they were strained a little by fixedly gazing at a distant object—were less brilliant than usual. Over them seemed to hang a mist, that made the look in them—for all that it was so strictly impersonal—rather thrillingly soft. She was very still: save that her hands—folded, and holding between them the rose that she had taken from the basket—twitched a little, and that there was a slightly tremulous movement of the crimson rose upon her breast.

“Madame may not have observed that I have asked her a question?” Monsieur Alphonse resumed—at the same time partly rising and moving nearer to her his chair. His action roused Madame Bellarmine from her reverie—if it

HE COULD NOT EVEN BE CERTAIN THAT SHE WAS LISTENING TO HIM



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were a reverie—and caused her to sit erect, as though with the intention of moving her own chair backward and so balancing his advance. However, her intention did not materialize. In a moment she leaned back again among her cushions, her look still fixed upon the distant hills.

“It is unfair, I own,” Monsieur Alphonse continued, “to expect Madame to remember so small a matter that happened so long ago. I should explain, perhaps, that the incident has remained fixed in my own memory because to me it was not a small matter. In effect, it was the most important matter of my whole life. I have referred to it only because it explains the seemingly inconsequent connection between my roses and my philosophy—in regard to which I had the temerity to fancy that Madame took an interest.”

“And it was because of—of that incident that Monsieur has devoted himself to roses and to philosophy through all these years?” Madame Bellarmine’s gaze continued to be fixed upon the remote mountains as she asked this question. She spoke in so low a tone that her words barely were audible above the humming of the bees.

“Assuredly, Madame,” Monsieur Alphonse answered, and again he a little advanced his chair.

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"No doubt Monsieur was well advised," Madame Bellarmine resumed, speaking meditatively and with more distinctness. "His roses have returned worthily the loving care that he has bestowed upon them. One has only to look at them"—she glanced downward at the basket—"to perceive that they have repaid his devotion by blooming with the splendor of the roses of Paradise! And as they worthily have filled his heart, so also, no doubt, his philosophy worthily has filled his mind. Decidedly, Monsieur has been well advised. Had there been another ending to the—the incident to which he refers, it is possible that neither his heart nor his mind would have been so well satisfied."

"It is *not* possible!" Monsieur Alphonse responded with energy; and added: "Neither the cultivation of roses nor the study of philosophy has satisfied me at all. What was necessary to my happiness when I was young still is necessary to my happiness now that I am old. Without it, I am but a broken old man."

"Monsieur forgets that he is but three years my senior. He implies that I am but a broken old woman—and that is an assertion which I positively deny!" Madame Bellarmine attempted a light tone and an accompanying light smile, but in neither of these attempts did she achieve

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a marked success. Moreover, she lost another point by suffering her eyes to encounter for a moment the eyes of Monsieur Alphonse. Being conscious that her eyes said something quite unlike what was said by her lips, she hastily diverted them to the distant hills.

Monsieur Alphonse answered her lips in the spirit of her eyes: "For me, Angèle, thou never canst be old. I love thee now as I loved thee long ago—only more!"

This speech fairly knocked the buttons off their foils. Madame Bellarmine drew a short breath, and for a full minute was silent—while she nerved herself to go on with sharpened swords. Then she said, speaking slowly, "It is conceivable, Monsieur, that a very young girl sometimes may be a fool."

To this proposition Monsieur Alphonse was not prepared to make an offhand answer. The truth of it was obvious, but its immediate application was less so. To agree with it might be impolitic, and certainly—because of the implied personal note—would be impolite. Rapidly reviewing these several facts, and rapidly coming to a conclusion, he discreetly held his tongue. For some seconds, therefore—while Madame Bellarmine gazed dreamily at the mountains, and while Monsieur Alphonse gazed by no

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means dreamily in precisely the opposite direction—the only sound upon the terrace, coming rumblingly through the warm air from the sunlit garden below them, was the loud humming of the bees. Then, as no comment was made upon her broad statement of fact, Madame Bel-larmine herself again took up the word.

“And being precisely a fool,” she resumed, “it therefore is conceivable that a very young girl—too young to know rightly her own heart—may commit an act of folly that will make her whole life go wrong.”

“That depends,” Monsieur Alphonse answered judicially, but with an unjudicial quaver in his voice, “upon what she may do later to correct her act of—of folly. The possibility is conceivable that corrective action of a positive sort, being applied in good time, may make her life go right again; and, also, if by chance her act of folly has made another life go wrong in much the same way, it farther is conceivable that the same timely corrective action which makes her own life go right again may make that other life go right again as well—filling it, indeed, with a happiness too great to be told in words!”

“When correction can be ‘applied in good time,’ as Monsieur cautiously observes, I admit that such fortunate results sometimes may be

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secured. But it is a truth which is recognized by philosophers generally, and therefore will be recognized by Monsieur particularly, that the errors of our youth cannot be corrected when we are old."

"Assuming, merely for argument's sake, that Madame might be disposed to apply her impersonal generalizations personally to herself, I beg to draw her attention to the fact that she is *not* old. It follows, logically, that should she desire to correct any errors of her youth—for example, an error that did make another life go wrong—she has abundant time in which her good intentions may be realized."

"Monsieur forgets that he repeatedly has commented—yesterday directly, to-day by implication—upon my advanced age."

"Madame forgets that on each of those occasions she perverted the meaning of my words and then denied her own perversion in set terms. She will observe, therefore, that I am but echoing her own statement of fact, as well as stating my own conviction, when I repeat my assertion that she still has ample time in which to correct that error of her earlier youth which made another life go wrong."

Monsieur Alphonse had endeavored to maintain the merely argumentative tone suitable

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to the discussion of abstractions. His endeavor, which had not been conspicuously successful, at this point quite broke down. In a tone that had nothing in common with either arguments or abstractions he added: "But oh, remember how long I have waited—and correct that error now, this very day!"

His last move forward had brought him close beside her. As he spoke he clasped her hand.

Madame Bellarmine, clearly worsted in the argument, made no reply: half admitting her defeat by suffering Monsieur Alphonse to retain her hand in his possession; half denying it by still giving her eyes to the far-off hills.

"Wilt thou accept my roses—all of them, Angèle?"

Then Madame Bellarmine gave her eyes also to Monsieur Alphonse as she said, very softly: "Yes, I will accept thy roses"—and added, with a delectable inconsequence: "We have lost twenty years!"

THE
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THE

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(A Pendant to "The Roses of Monsieur Alphonse")

"SAINTS in Heaven! Monsieur is bereft of his reason!" Césarine, Monsieur Gaillard's housekeeper, uttered these words with astonishment and also with asperity. As though invoking the help of the saints of Heaven, she raised her hands.

Toward Monsieur Gaillard the attitude of Césarine at all times was monitorial. Having carried him in her arms in babyhood, she had privileges. As the head of his comfortable little establishment in Paris—he had brought her up from Lohéac, his excellent estate in vines in the Midi, to take charge of it—she had rights. That her cookings were as of Paradise could not be questioned. That her temper was as of a region antipodal to Paradise could not be denied. Between herself and her master there was so strong a friendship that its most frequent manifestation was open war.

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In effect, the scene that Césarine beheld seemed to justify her discourteous assertion and to warrant her invocation of saintly aid.

Seated at his own dining-table was Monsieur Gaillard. In the center of the table—covered with a green cloth and not laid for a meal—was a large urn-like soup-tureen of elegant design. Standing upon the cover of the tureen, and retaining with difficulty his position upon that slippery height, was a black poodle: his head upraised and his mouth wide open, as though—as was the fact—in the act of uttering a formidable howl. Being a housekeeper with a high sense of her responsibilities, and a woman of such undaunted neatness that she would not have hesitated to rebuke an untidy archangel, it was the desecration of the best soup-tureen that reasonably aroused Césarine's wrath.

Monsieur Gaillard started, guiltily. His back was toward the door, and the door had been opened with so considerate a gentleness that his first knowledge of Césarine's undesired presence was conveyed to him in her remonstrant words. The poodle, taking advantage of the diversion, slid down gladly from his bad eminence and jumped from the table to the floor with a cheerful bark.

“Monsieur perhaps will have the goodness

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to explain this childish folly?" observed Césarine stiffly.

"With willingness, my good Césarine," Monsieur Gaillard replied; but in a tone that had not willingness as its dominant note. "As thou knowest, this faithful animal is the only creature in the world who has for me an unswerving affection—"

"Monsieur pays me a compliment upon my long years of devotion. He will be pleased to accept my thanks!" By way of emphasizing her devotion, Césarine glared.

"Truly, truly, my good Césarine, thy affection for me is above praise. But even thou thyself must admit that it is of a brittleness—that thy manifestations of it most often take the form of a reproof and a frown. But I will put the case in different words. Pierrot has an affection for me that in all seasons is persistent and unquestioning. I am teaching, therefore, that wholly loyal animal to sit lamenting upon my tomb: into which—broken-hearted by thou knowest what perfidy—I shall descend at no distant day!" Monsieur Gaillard lowered his voice to a key of becoming melancholy as he uttered, appealingly, these dismally prophetic words.

Césarine refused to respond to his appeal. With a coldness she replied, questioningly:

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“Monsieur then has the intention to be reduced to soup, and to go down into his tomb in the soup-tureen? This is a new arrangement. Repeatedly he has informed me that it was his purpose to go down into his tomb roasted. Truly, if Monsieur desires to enter Eternity through the kitchen, I venture to advise him to adhere to his roasting plan.”

“My roasting plan, as thou so unfeelingly callest it, Césarine, has not been abandoned. I shall be cremated, as I often have told thee, and my ashes will be deposited in a silver urn. This urn will be placed in the niche already prepared for it in my library. On it will be engraved the touching inscription: ‘He died of a broken heart’!”

“Has Monsieur arranged that the number of years shall be stated during which the breaking of his heart has proceeded? To my own knowledge more than a score have passed since—because of that minx—it had its beginning; and even yet—Monsieur now being turned of forty-five, though I will do him the justice to say that he does not look it—I venture to assert that the process is incomplete. But we lose sight of the main matter. I would ask again: Why is this unclean animal permitted to associate himself with my best tureen?”

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“Putting aside the fact—that no one knows better than thyself, who thyself saw to it that he was washed but this very morning—that Pierrot is of a cleanliness—”

“Cleanliness sufficing to justify association with a soup-tureen is impossible for any dog!” Césarine interrupted hotly.

“Putting that aside, I say,” continued Monsieur Gaillard; “canst thou not perceive, dull woman that thou art, that already thy question has been answered? Have I not told thee that my ashes are to repose in a silver urn? Equally, have I not told thee that I have been teaching Pierrot to stand lamenting upon my tomb? The matter explains itself. If Pierrot can maintain himself upon this slippery vessel, it follows that he easily can maintain himself—while howling appropriately—upon my mortuary urn of silver: the top of which, expressly to make more facile his act of devotion, will be somewhat flattened, and so roughened with embossments that he will have a hold for his claws. With my nephew all is arranged. Once a week, for so long as the worthy animal lives, Pierrot will be conducted to the library and encouraged to jump to the niche and thence to mount upon the urn. There, for a reasonable length of time, the faithful creature will remain—uttering at intervals

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lamenting howls. Thus shall it be, Césarine, when I am but ashes, that one faithful heart—in contrast with the cruel heart that was unfaithful—will mourn for me. Truly, it will be a beautiful, a sacred rite that my poor Pierrot will perform!"

Monsieur Gaillard for a moment maintained a sad silence. Then, quite cheerfully, he added: "Now I will show thee how well the good Pierrot has learned his new trick—though trick is much too light a word to apply to an act so animated with a pensive tenderness." And, turning to Pierrot, he patted on the table and said encouragingly: "Mount, good dog!"

"Monsieur will show me nothing of the sort!" cried Césarine sharply and strongly. "The idea of it! To defile my superb tureen with that abominable beast—and before my very eyes! I shall place it in hiding against such sacrilege. It will appear only on occasions of ceremony—when even Monsieur will be compelled to hold his follies in control!"

Accommodating her actions to her words, Césarine snatched up the tureen from the table and—cherishing it in her arms protectingly—bolted from the room.

Presently, presumably having placed the tureen in safety, Césarine returned. She had

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the fighting blood of the South in her veins, this excellent woman; and when that blood fairly was up she was not content with a fight that lasted through but a single round.

“Having compelled Monsieur to come to reason in the matter of dogs and vessels belonging to the dinner,” she said resolutely: “I shall be glad to go more deeply into that matter of his heartbreak. It is a matter that—having heard overmuch about it—I would wish to settle with him, once and for all. And, by Monsieur’s permission, we will treat it seriously. At the beginning we will grant that, other things being equal, the marriage that was to make Monsieur’s estate of Lohéac and the Roustan estate of Clérensac all of one tenant was reasonable.”

“That good project,” said Monsieur Gaillard, speaking very earnestly, “was deep in my father’s heart. He died lamenting—and I live lamenting—that it was not realized. It was well worth doing—even at a cost!”

“But it was not worth doing,” Césarine continued, “at the cost of a marriage that immediately would have repented itself; and that, precisely, would have been its cost had Monsieur married Mademoiselle Angèle Roustan. I will ask Monsieur to recall the bad tempers of that person even when she was a very little girl—a

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chunky little girl, with over-fat little legs and yellow hair."

"Thou art unjust to the poor Angèle, very unjust, Césarine. Her bad tempers were of my making. Scamp that I was, I would set Froufrou to snapping at those plump legs of hers that I might enjoy her terrors; that I might enjoy her pain, I would pull her yellow hair!"

"Monsieur's conduct, perhaps, was not wholly irreproachable. He was a boy—and all boys are imps of Satan. But how was she later; when she came to be a young lady—always of a romantic silliness, and always of a pig-headedness that made her sullen when she was contradicted and furious when she was crossed? Does Monsieur recall the sentimental follies that came of her convent readings—and her absurd demands?"

"I remember," Monsieur Gaillard smiled a little, "that she wanted me to kill a dragon for her. But that was earlier—after her nurse had told her the story of the Tarasque."

"I do not refer to that period, as Monsieur well knows. I refer to the time when Monsieur had completed his course at Montpellier and was come home again—to be immediately married, as we all believed—and she declared that he must ask to be called to the colors of his regiment and go for a while and fight black men in

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Africa, in order to make himself worthy of her by heroic deeds; and then, when he properly refused to do anything so crazy, fell into one of her rages and called him a coward."

"That is not a pleasant thing to remember." Monsieur Gaillard spoke gravely. "It was then that the breaking of my heart began."

"Monsieur is asked to keep in mind that we now are talking seriously. His heart, as he well knows, never was even near breaking. He has played with that fancy because his nature is whimsical—and it has served him as an excellent excuse when at first his good parents, and later his friends, have urged him to range himself by marrying: a state for which I am of the opinion, based on knowledge, that he has little aptitude and absolutely no desire."

Césarine undoubtedly knew much that justified this assertion. In spite of herself, as she made it, she smiled. Monsieur Gaillard, knowing her knowledge, openly laughed.

"With Monsieur's permission, then," she resumed, "we will leave the broken heart out of the question. But Monsieur has reason in saying that when his refusal was given to that silly fancy, a most just refusal, the end had its beginning. His heart was not broken, but it was hurt; and the hurt was deepened by the sudden

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anger that met his refusal—and that continued after it until the end came. For me, I am assured that the head of that young lady had maggots in it. Nothing less explains!"

"She certainly had peculiarities," Monsieur Gaillard admitted.

"Beyond a question, she *did* have peculiarities!" said Césarine with emphasis. "What a life she must have led that poor Monsieur Beau-melle—whom she married in her spiteful anger, and whom she so soon harried into his grave! Monsieur certainly has no need to be heart-broken because it was not on his own back that her blows fell! And observe what has come of it all! By her absences and her bad managings she has made ricochets of Clérensac—until, they say, the vines are near ruined. That part saddens me: when I think of how Monsieur, by his cares and his sagacities, would have grown on those vines—as on his own of Lohéac—harvests of grapes which would have yielded streams of gold. Killing dragons and fighting black men, indeed, for such a woman! Even at the cost of losing Clérensac, Monsieur has made a good escape. I give him my felicitations with my whole heart!"

Césarine drew a long breath, and for a moment was silent—while she enjoyed the feeling of

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conscious rectitude that attends upon one who has cleared the air by exhibiting unpleasant facts bared to their very bones. But the affair of the tureen still rankled, and her moral yet remained to be applied.

"And now I would have Monsieur to understand," she resumed, speaking in a strong voice, "that this matter of his broken heart—while a fancy that he is free to play with in any harmlessly foolish fashion that pleases him—never again is to be made an excuse for such disgraces as he and Pierrot together have put upon propriety to-day. Pierrot, at the best, is filled to suffocation with desires to commit unimaginable sinnings. If my back is turned upon him for but one single instant—and he watches for that instant—he delights in occupying himself in malignant crimes. It is enough that my life should be made a burden to me by interminable iniquities of his own devising; it is far too much—far more than I will put up with—that Monsieur should set him to the doing of even viler acts of wickedness than come from the conceivings of his own evil heart. Solemnly, then, I warn Monsieur that this odious scene must not be repeated. Solemnly I tell him that if again he mixes his revolting dog with my dishes it must be over my dead body—and even my dead

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body will thrill with a just horror if over it such profligate pollutions occur!"

Having thus delivered herself, in a manner that left Monsieur Gaillard crushed by the logic of her argument and stunned by the energy of her climax, Césarine retired in good order to the kitchen; proudly conscious that in this battle of her own inviting she had driven home a victorious charge.

So far as they concerned Monsieur Gaillard's supposititious heartbreak, Césarine's several assertions—while perhaps a little warped by her prejudices—essentially were statements of fact. So far as they concerned the iniquities of Pierrot, less can be said—since in making them her prejudices fairly had carried her away.

That Pierrot had a hatful of impish traits is undeniable—he would not have been a poodle without them. But they far were outweighed—save in the estimation of Césarine, upon whom for the most part they were practised—by his many interesting and engaging amiabilities. In addition to being a dog of a most loving and lovable nature, he was the possessor of such rare intelligence that he easily had acquired an extraordinarily varied equipment of elegant accomplishments — and so thoroughly that prompting was unnecessary to assure their dis-

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HIS ENTRY WAS MADE ON HIS HIND LEGS



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play. Keeping them in his pocket, he produced them of his own accord as occasion required.

Thus, of a morning, it was his habit, unbidden, to enter his master's chamber in the immediate wake of his master's coffee. His entry was made on his hind legs. Being come to the center of the room, holding himself always with a soldierly erectness, he raised to his forehead his right paw. In that military attitude of respect he remained until his salute had been returned. Then, with a genial bark by way of saying good morning, he resumed the use of his normal supply of legs and chased around the room with great realism an imaginary cat—a performance that was the more interesting because it wholly was an invention of his own. As the spirit moved him, other of his tricks were exhibited; and in conclusion, walking on his hind legs and carrying carefully in his mouth a saucer, he solicited and received his rewarding lumps of sugar: which he ate with such nicety, after placing the saucer on the floor, that even Césarine—who was not in accord with this use of sugar—could not find remaining on the sedulously waxed tiles so much as a single contaminating grain.

On the morning sequent to the affair of the soup-tureen this pleasing ceremony was cut to a

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shortness that was not at all to Pierrot's liking. Being an artist, he respected his art and was pained when it was slighted. The scant attention accorded to him by Monsieur Gaillard hurt his feelings: as he made manifest by stopping in the very act of standing on his head—his most notable performance—and retiring to a corner in a dignified sulk. Under ordinary conditions Monsieur Gaillard would have apologized; but on that particular morning he was in very much of a hurry and had matters of a gravity upon his mind. An affair of importance with a wine-merchant—an affair that for some time had been in progress, and not in smooth progress—was to be concluded within the next hour or two. With his thoughts thus deeply engaged, he made no more than a perfunctory effort to soothe Pierrot's hurt feelings; drank his coffee in unseemly gulps, and hastened away anxiously to the Halle aux Vins.

His return, some hours later, was of a smiling leisureliness. His affair with the wine-merchant had been concluded to a marvel—better than his expectations, better even than his hopes. Feeling that he had earned his breakfast, he looked forward to eating that meal with a just pleasure—that made him sniff eagerly at the agreeable whiffs from it which came to him as he opened

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his door. To his surprise, he was not met at the door by Pierrot—whose habit it was to welcome his returns punctually, and to carry to his dressing-room his cane and his gloves. But Pierrot's dereliction was put in the background by the odor of the breakfast: which his nose informed him was something out of the common—as usually was the case on the mornings following the evenings when Césarine and her master had been at odds. Hurrying to his dressing-room, and thence to the breakfast-table, he awaited his feast impatiently—yet even in his impatience noted with satisfaction that the soup-tureen was back in its place on the buffet. “Ah, the good Césarine bears no malice,” he thought kindly. “Peace is restored!”

Yet there was something in Césarine's look and manner, as she brought the omelette, that distinctly was disturbing. Her movements were abrupt and awkward. She had an evasive air—almost an air of guilt. Beneath her eyes—which looked everywhere but into Monsieur Gaillard's eyes—were dark marks. As she placed the omelette on the table her hands trembled. Positively, had she seasoned it with hellebore her manner could not have been more odd!

“Clearly, peace is *not* restored,” was Monsieur Gaillard's internal comment upon these

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curious manifestations of Césarine's mental uneasiness. But experience had taught him that domestic crises of this nature—rarely, however, of this intensity—best were dealt with by ignoring them. Pursuing, then, the *laissez-faire* policy, and also touching on a matter that was beginning to cause him some anxiety, his spoken words were: “Where is Pierrot, my good Césarine? He did not meet me at the door, and he is not here to breakfast with me. I offended him this morning. Has the brave beast felt my rudeness so keenly that he has become ill?”

“I have no knowledge of Pierrot’s health, Monsieur,” Césarine answered coldly, but with a curious catch in her voice.

“But where is he? The tureen, I observe, is not locked up. Surely, in thy anger, thou hast not locked up the dog?”

“I have not locked up the dog, Monsieur. As Monsieur knows, locking him up would be useless. He is in league with the devil, that animal! He can open all doors easily, and even can turn keys.”

“It is thy own evil temper that should be under lock and key,” said Monsieur Gaillard hotly; and more hotly added: “Bring Pierrot to me without another single instant of delay!”

Césarine quailed for a moment. Then, pulling

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herself together, she answered stolidly: "It is impossible to comply with Monsieur's command. Pierrot is not in the apartment. Pierrot has disappeared!"

Had the uneaten remnant of the omelette suddenly transformed itself into a bomb and exploded, Monsieur Gaillard would not have been more effectually stunned than he was by this doomful utterance. Articulate speech was quite beyond his power.

Breaking the oppressive silence, Césarine herself took the word. With head bowed down, and speaking in a strained voice that lacked inflection —the voice that a murderer would use in making her confession—she continued: "It is not my fault, Monsieur. The matter happened in this way: Pierrot accompanied me this morning, as always, when I went to make my marketings. As always, he carried the basket. As always—disregarding the purity of my basket, disregarding everything but the gratification of his own low desires for amusement—he engaged himself in conversation with every ill-conditioned cur that we met upon the way. I will do him the justice to say that it was in the company of a dog of good breeding that he vanished: the pug that the stout lady carried, and that—almost as though she sought to attract our Pierrot's

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attention—she put down out of her arms as he drew near. Naturally, Pierrot—”

“Vanished? Stout lady? Pug? What far-rago is this, Césarine? Art thou crazed?”

In dull tones Césarine went on: “The stout lady with the pug, as I have told Monsieur, was as though waiting for our coming. On the instant that Pierrot entered into conversation with the pug—Pierrot had run on ahead of me—she turned a corner quickly. After her went the pug. After the pug went Pierrot. When I came to be arrived at the corner they all, as I say, had vanished. Only my respectable basket, lying abandoned in the gutter, remained. In the whole street there was to be seen nothing moving save a fiacre that was driving rapidly away!”

“Well?” demanded Monsieur Gaillard sternly.

“I called for Pierrot, Monsieur, ceaselessly. My callings were unheeded. I waited for his return with a patience.” Césarine groaned.

“Well?” demanded Monsieur, still more sternly.

Césarine covered her face with her apron and gave vent to sobs. From beneath her apron, in a voice that her sobs rendered almost inarticulate, she answered despairingly: “Monsieur, he did *not* return!”

Stricken by those words of woeful finality as

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by a thunderbolt, Monsieur Gaillard clutched his forehead and uttered a lamentable cry. Then, leaning forward upon the breakfast-table—only by a hair's breadth escaping the omelette—he buried his face in anguish in his hands!

Broken only by Césarine's snuffling sobs—the emotion of Monsieur Gaillard was too profound for audible expression—there rested during some heartbreaking moments upon that chamber of desolation an agonized silence. Then, suddenly, a bell rang sharply—the bell of the outer door.

Monsieur Gaillard, overwhelmed by his grief, remained unmoved by this interruption. Césarine, automatically responding to the summons to discharge an every-day duty, automatically went to the door and opened it. Outside was a commissionnaire, holding in his hand a letter. "No answer!" he said curtly, giving the letter to Césarine, and hurried down the stair. Evidently, his instructions as to the delivery of the letter must have been explicit—since the whole of the address upon it, in a handwriting curiously cramped, was: "To Monsieur the owner of Pierrot."

For an instant Césarine's wits failed to act. Then they overacted. "Monsieur! Monsieur!" she cried joyfully. "Pierrot is not lost. Here is a letter that he himself has written to tell us

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where he is!" And under her breath she added: "He is capable of it, that animal—who is of the same breast with the imps of sin!"

"Thou art demented, Césarine," Monsieur Gaillard answered shortly. But it was with a thrill of hope, aroused by the strange superscription, that he opened the letter; and his hope grew stronger as he read these cheering but somewhat cryptic words: "With a friend no less faithfully affectionate, Pierrot awaits here his master's coming"—to which was added an address in a street of a minor importance, but of a conceded respectability, in the region lying to the northwestward of the Arch.

Césarine—persisting in the direction that her overacting wits had taken—demanded eagerly: "Where is he? What is it that the brave beast tells of himself?"

"Imbecile woman!" Monsieur Gaillard responded discourteously. "Bring me at once my hat and my gloves!" In another instant, leaving his unfinished breakfast to languish, he had departed on the wings of the wind!

"It is a dog that Monsieur is in search of?" said the concierge politely. "Certainly. To the fourth, if Monsieur pleases. I myself will have the pleasure to sound the bell."

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"To the fourth?" Monsieur Gaillard queried, a little doubtfully.

"To the fourth, if Monsieur pleases," the concierge repeated; and added: "Monsieur is expected. The door is directly at the head of the stair."

During his drive Monsieur Gaillard had had ample leisure—a Paris cab having little in common with the wings of the wind on which he had started—to read repeatedly the curious letter that had sent him on his quest; and with each reading of it the words "with a friend no less faithfully affectionate" increasingly had aroused in him a curiosity that was not unmixed with doubt. To the best of his knowledge, he had not in all that quarter of the city even a remote acquaintance—let alone a faithfully affectionate friend. There was a disquieting suggestion of allurement in the phrase; and this suggestion became stronger when he found that his destination was an apartment above and away from the street by four flights of stairs. As he mounted those stairs, with a cumulative slowness, he regretted that he had neglected to bring with him his cane.

Being arrived at last at the fourth floor, he found the door of the stair-head held open for him by an elderly maid-servant: about whom

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there was something vaguely familiar which gave him the feeling that in another moment he would remember, and would call her by, her name. That her memory was more precise, and worked with accuracy, was demonstrated by her words. "Good day, Monsieur Gaillard," she said with a smile of recognition and of welcome. "Be good enough to enter. Madame in a moment will attend."

To his surprise, she did not speak in French, but in the langue d'oc of his own Southern home. In this fact there seemed to him to be a clue to his vague memories—but he did not pursue it, because at that instant there came from beyond a closed door at the end of the passage a volley of rejoicing barks.

"Ah, the good beast!" said the maid-servant. "He perceives that his master is near him! I would release him at once to happiness but for my commands. It is Madame herself who would confer that pleasure upon him—and upon Monsieur." While thus speaking, the maid-servant had led Monsieur Gaillard to the doorway of the salon. "In but another moment Madame will attend," she repeated, standing aside that he might enter—and so left him, closing behind her the door.

After his pull up the stairs, Monsieur Gaillard

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thankfully seated himself—in an exceptionally broad arm-chair, covered with crimson plush and having on its back a green tête-à-tête embroidered energetically with purple flowers—and with a natural interest looked around him. His first glance assured him that his regrets for his cane were needless. Smilingly he perceived that whatever dangers might lurk in that highly emphasized little salon they were not of the sort to be attacked with canes.

In its very essence the room was feminine: crowded with knickknacks, obviously of a souvenir type; cluttered with overloaded little tables; the dominant pictures of a religious type; on all the chair-backs polychromatic discords done in crewels. Yet the chairs, oddly, were of an extraordinary width and massiveness. Not one of them but would have sustained uncomplainingly an unusually broadly based and very heavy man. The scheme of color—in the carpet, the wall-paper, the curtains, the upholstery, the crewel-work tête-à-têtes—was nothing less than staggering. It was as though an ill-made rainbow had exploded in a bad dream. Yet this violent salon—while it fairly set his teeth on edge—made a reminiscent appeal to Monsieur Gaillard in which was a note of pathos: turning his thoughts—already bent in that direction by the

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maid-servant's use of his own home language—to the many other like salons that he had known so well, down there in the Midi, when he was a boy.

The moment lengthened in which Madame the owner of this chatoyant apartment was to appear. With an interest quickened by the stirring of his youthful memories, Monsieur Gaillard arose from his chair and began an inspection of the countless queer little objects—statuettes, carvings, framed photographs, fantastic trifles in bronze and glass and china—which were strewn thickly about the room. It was an inspection that by turns invited his smiles and compelled his shudders—until, coming to the mantel-shelf, both smiles and shudders were submerged in the emotion incident to a sharply startling surprise. In that place of honor, as in a shrine, flanked on the one side by a stuffed cat (presumably a deceased pet), and on the other by a large statuette of the Virgin of Lourdes, was a silver-framed photograph of—himself!

But it was the himself of a far back, a more than thirty years back, past. The photograph, faded and dim, was a carte-de-visite—of the time when the fashion set by the Duke of Parma, having spent itself in Paris, was regnant in the

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provinces—of a curly-headed boy of twelve. He remembered with a thrill his intense joy when it was taken—down there in *Cette*, whither he had been carried by his father, who had wine matters to attend to, as a reward for having passed well his examinations for the *Lycée*; and his pride, when he was come home again to *Lohéac*, in leaving these elegant proofs that he was a man of fashion at the homes of his neighboring friends. That one of the little pictures should have survived so long; that he should find it amidst such grotesque surroundings; that it so obviously was cherished as the greatest treasure that the owner of that museum of tawdry oddities possessed: all this made up a triple marvel that fairly brought him to a stand. And then a fourth dimension was added to his wonder. As he held the little picture in his hand, closely examining it for some hint of its history, he heard pronounced quaveringly—in a voice that seemed to touch yet another deep chord of memory—his own name: “*Gaston!*”

Monsieur Gaillard’s nerves were tense. He had had his fill of affronting surprises and mysteries. On hearing his name spoken so familiarly, in a voice vaguely recognized, he sighed with relief. Confidently expecting that all the mysteries and surprises immediately

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would be explained and accounted for, he turned sharply—to behold, standing in the doorway of the salon, a lady upon whom he never consciously had laid eyes! Algebraic concepts must be invoked to satisfy the situation. It was to the fifth dimension that his bemazement was raised.

At least this unknown lady was in harmony with her environment—strikingly so in the matter of the broad and massive chairs. Her size—her width, to be precise—was prodigious. Exceptional though they were in breadth and in strength, the chairs had their work cut out for them. Her color-scheme was even more pronounced than was that of the apartment. In the case of the apartment, as has been stated, it was as though an ill-made rainbow had exploded. In the case of the lady it was as though two ill-made rainbows—shattered by a collision with the irresistible abundance of her person—had overflowed her with incongruous hues. Her prismatic effect was not confined to her garments. The wide area of her billowy smiling face, and the luxuriant circumferences of her bared arms, were enriched warmly with the first color of the spectrum. The third color, somewhat dulled, coyly had taken refuge in her hair. Her effect upon Monsieur Gaillard—

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like that of the crewel-work têteières—was to incline him at once to shudder and to laugh.

Her smile faded as she perceived his look of utter blankness. There was a note of pain in her voice as she asked: “Dost thou not know me, Gaston? Am I then so changed?”

Disposed as he was to turn to ancient memories, that sorrow-touched familiar voice of a sudden conjured up before him a vision of a fat little girl whose yellow hair he was pulling—and so put the key to the puzzle in his hand. In place of the blank look on his face came a look of recognition—not joyful recognition, precisely; and in a tone of surprise—not joyful surprise, precisely—he exclaimed: “Surely, it is Madame Beaumelle!”

“Call me not by that hated name, on which my young life was shipwrecked! To thee, Gaston, as always, I am ‘little Angèle’!”

Monsieur Gaillard, who was not destitute of a sense of humor, politely concealed by stroking his mustache the impolite action of the muscles of his mouth: induced by the reflection that, dimensionally, the adjective was inappropriate; and that the noun—as indicating resemblance to even the Flemish type of angel—distinctly was misapplied. But the essence of the appeal—irrespective of its verbal inaccuracies—caused

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him a certain embarrassment. Being of a cautious habit, and in possession of a considerable store of worldly wisdom, a suitable method of meeting this suddenly presented sight draft on his sympathies—even on his affections—did not instantly frame itself in his mind.

Breaking the silence, that dragged a little, the lady herself took the word. “Thou art not angry with me, Gaston,” she asked in a tone of coquettish plaintiveness, “for having contrived my little comedy to bring thee here? It was an inspiration, my dog-stealing! At first I thought —ah, for long I have thought—of writing a letter asking thee to come to me. But I knew too well that a letter would bring—if it brought me anything—only a letter in reply. In search of thy dog, to whom thy heart is tender, I felt assured that thou wouldest come thyself. I do not blame thee for holding me as less than thy dog, Gaston. Thou hast much to forgive me. I was cruel, and I was false!”

Madame Beaumelle made these self-deprecatory statements mournfully. Having made them, she paused and sighed. Her sigh distinctly was interrogative—implying that the opportunity to deliver a monologue was not the first thing that she desired.

Indeed, common courtesy demanded that

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Monsieur Gaillard should not remain indefinitely silent. Nor did he. Being still engaged in reflections prompted by caution and worldly wisdom, his reply was a trifle slow in coming; but it was marked by acumen when it came.

"Madame's little comedy is delightful," he said, speaking in a tone of cheerfulness that was in pronounced contrast with Madame Beaumelle's tone of sorrow. "I enjoy to the utmost her amusing contrivings—so ingenious—so spirituelle! But, surely, Madame will not transform her comedy into a tragedy by truly stealing my good Pierrot? She will give him back to me? Indeed, I am sure of it. Eliso—I remember her name, now. She has aged, yet I was sure that I knew her—promised me as much when she met me at the door."

It is possible that Madame Beaumelle was not wholly satisfied with the direction that Monsieur Gaillard was giving to the conversation. Conceivably, she would have been better pleased had he touched, even bitterly, on the self-condemnatory reminiscent section of her remarks. His compliments upon her dog-stealing comedy undoubtedly were made with a grace—but he had used them as a base for a much too prompt reversion to the prosaic matter of the stolen dog. However, Madame

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Beaumelle herself was not without a certain skill in directing conversation. Again she gave matters a reminiscent turn.

"Be not afraid, Gaston," she said sadly, "thou shalt have back thy Pierrot. I have no wish to make my comedy a tragedy. For me, I have had enough of tragedy—in the stinging sorrows of my own poor heart! But hast thou no care to know—before I return him to thee—what has befallen me in all the years that have passed since, by my own act of folly, the embitterment of my life began?"

Assuredly, any other phase of antiquarian research would have been more agreeable to Monsieur Gaillard than that which Madame Beaumelle proposed to him. But his preferences in the matter were not consulted. Assuming an affirmative reply to her question, without pause she continued: "They have been dreary years, black years, Gaston. My soul has suffered all agonies! And in these later times other troubles have come upon me—of a meaner sort, but bitingly hard to bear. Even now I have in hand the selling of Clérensac. For such managings I have no aptitude, and I am weary of seeing all down there go wrong. It will sell for but a half of its value—since much must be spent upon it to set it in repair again—but for enough

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to permit me to live in modest comfort. Ah, if things had gone differently! *Thy* vines are the boast of the region, Gaston!"

"Thanks. Yes. Quite so. They really are doing very well indeed," Monsieur Gaillard replied absently—wholly missing the point that Madame Beaumelle so delicately had made in her just compliment upon his vinicultural skill.

In point of fact, the announcement that Clérensac was to be sold, and at a bargain, completely filled his mind. At last the way was open to him to realize his dream of acquiring that estate by purchase—without encumbrances—and of enclosing it with Lohéac in the ring-fence that so long ago had been planned. Being wholly engrossed with this very practical matter, it is not surprising that the sentimental innuendo conveyed in Madame Beaumelle's affirmation of the good results that would have attended his earlier acquisition of the estate—with encumbrances—quite escaped his notice. What did not escape his notice, however, was the business-like appositeness with which her revival of her alleged youthful romance precisely synchronized with a partial crisis—that its belated realization would quiet—in her financial affairs.

Inferring, correctly, from his tone and manner that Monsieur Gaillard was not thinking at all

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about his vines; and inferring, incorrectly, the direction that his thoughts had taken, Madame Beaumelle was encouraged thus to proceed:

“And thy life, also, Gaston, has gone ill! Not in material things—it is a matter of renown how thou hast enriched thyself—but in the deep matters of the soul. All that is known to me. I have kept myself informed. Yes, though thou hast not been conscious of it, through all these weary years I ever have hovered over thee!” (Of a sudden Monsieur Gaillard had so vivid a mental perception of Madame Beaumelle in that abnormal position, and of his personal peril in case any part of her hovering apparatus went wrong, that again his mustache was covered with his hand.) “Thus watching thee, I have beheld—at once admiringly and grievingly—thy lonely life: of which my perfidy and thy faithfulness have been the cause. Thou hast been nobly constant, Gaston, most nobly constant, to one who little has deserved such loyal love!”

“Don’t mention it!” was Monsieur Gaillard’s undeniably feeble rejoinder to this fervid utterance. But his words, if inadequate, were sincere. He was conscious that the sort of loneliness which he had suffered did not directly invite compassion; and he equally was conscious that the tribute to his constancy appreciably

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was more emphatic than his exercise of that virtue deserved. Moreover, the lady's reiterated self-reproaches were embarrassing: inviting him on the one hand to a dismally rude acquiescence, and on the other to a dangerously suave denial. Really, if he meant—and he did mean—to keep the situation in hand, "Il n'y a pas de quoi" was quite the best thing that he could say.

Madame Beaumelle, however, seemingly found his reply unsufficing. Again she sighed. But as he made no addition to it she continued: "Yet, truly, I myself have not been disloyal, Gaston; at least, not after the realization of my error—and that realization came cruelly soon. In thy own hand, but a moment ago, thou hadst the little picture that through all these years I have cherished. As thou seest, I guard it sacredly: between the image that I brought back when I made my pilgrimage—canst thou guess, Gaston, what I prayed for?—and my Abelard, who for years was the comfort of my forsaken heart. He was adorable! Even my pug has not usurped his place. After thee, Gaston—yes, I say it frankly—Abelard was the only living creature whom I truly and unalterably have loved!"

It is improbable that Monsieur Gaillard ac-

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cepted precisely as a compliment this avowal by Madame Beaumelle of the mixed bestowals of her unalterable affections; and it is certain that his comment upon her disposition of them was not that which she anticipated. Modestly ignoring his own share in their distribution, he fixed his regards admiringly upon the deceased Abelard and said with a warm enthusiasm: "What a perfectly superb cat he must have been!"

Madame Beaumelle's red face became appreciably redder. Dead cats at that moment did not hold the leading place in her thoughts. That Monsieur Gaillard should deliver his tactless eulogy in the very thick of the crisis that she so resolutely had precipitated was far more than a courtesy. Her broad person visibly swelled!

"And loving that magnificent animal as she did," Monsieur Gaillard affably continued, "Madame cannot but sympathize with me in my love for my brave Pierrot. Surely she will repent of her stealings"—his tone became that of kindly raillery—"and will surrender him without forcing me to call upon the police for aid? Her comedy, as I have assured her, has been most amusing. But now, seriously, I must have my dog again; and must take him, and myself, away—already I have trespassed too

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long equally upon Madame's good nature and her time." Monsieur Gaillard spoke these words with a finality. As though to enforce them, there came faintly, muffled by intervening doors, the sound of complaining barks. "Ah, the faithful beast!" he added. "Knowing that I am here, he grows impatient. Hearken to his cry for me! Madame surely will yield to our joint appeal!"

On the ears of Madame Beaumelle neither the barks of Pierrot nor the words of his master fell gratefully. Her eyes, deep-set in the billows of her glowing cheeks, glittered dangerously. For a moment she seemed to be about to give vent to speech in accord with the flashings of her eyes. By a perceptible effort she controlled herself; and when she did speak it was in gentle and even playful tones. She was of a resolute nature, this lady; and she had a sufficient acquaintance with the art of warfare to know that battles sometimes are won by a change of front.

"It is the same with thee still, Gaston," she said, "thy love of dogs. How well I recall thy affection for thy little Froufrou! Dost thou remember how thou wouldest terrify me by setting him to snapping at my baby calves? Art thou still so cruel?" Again Monsieur Gaillard's hand stroked his mustache—as the thought occurred

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to him that were he to resume the practice of that particular form of cruelty at least a mastiff would be required!

“How wickedly, too,” she continued in a tone that was less playful than tender, “thou wouldest pull my hair! Truly, I almost fear to be near thee even now!” By way of emphasizing her dread of such dangerous propinquity, Madame Beaumelle drew her chair nearer to Monsieur Gaillard, and so inclined her head that it easily was within reach of his hand. It was a compliment that she thus paid to the soundness of her own physical preservation. Clearly, there was no taint of commercialism in her hair.

“And now, at once, for Pierrot!” cried Monsieur Gaillard, with a decisiveness in which distinctly was perceptible a note of alarm.

At that crisis instant—as a delivering angel from heaven, according to Monsieur Gaillard’s view of the situation; as a marring fiend from hell, according to the view that Madame Beaumelle took of it—the door opened and Pierrot burst into the room all in a whirl of frisking joy! (While Césarine was wrong in declaring that this sagacious animal was in league with the powers of evil, she had reason in asserting that he could open all doors easily and even could turn keys.)

Madame Beaumelle snatched back her head

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and jerked back her chair as though she had been stung: intuitively conscious, in that terrible moment, that the arrival of Pierrot upon the field was for her what for the Emperor was the coming up of the Prussians at Waterloo!

It speaks well for Monsieur Gaillard's coolness, and also for his sense of opportunism, that he used his reinforcements—to pursue the simile—with the genius of a Wellington. Rising, he cried sharply: “Thou forgettest thy manners, Pierrot! Attention! Salute!” And Pierrot—even in his emotions responding to the call of duty—not only rose erect and saluted Madame Beaumelle, but of his own accord went on to his difficult feat of standing on his head and wagging gracefully in the air his inverted tail.

“Madame perceives for herself my Pierrot’s rare intelligence,” said Monsieur Gaillard blandly; “and so will understand why I so cherish him in my affections: even as Madame declares that she once cherished me, and—later—Abelard. But that is not nearly all. He can perform endless wonders, my Pierrot. If Madame conveniently can permit me the use of her umbrella, she shall see his proficiency in the manual of arms. I am pained to trouble her—but I have neglected to bring with me my cane.”

As he reverted to his lack of that offensive

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weapon—and at the same time realized that he seemed to be getting on quite well with a rapier—Monsieur Gaillard for the last time covered his mustache with his hand.

The effect produced upon Madame Beaumelle by this offensive exhibition of Pierrot's accomplishments—in which she found a climax of insulting negation to her hopes—was identical with the effect that popularly is attributed to a display of the Gorgon's Head. As one stunned, she regarded the contraposed Pierrot with a frozen stare!

Monsieur Gaillard's intentionally rasping request for an umbrella—acting as act the noisome fumes of burning feathers held under the nose of a person in a faint—revived her to consciousness and to action. Slowly rising from her chair, she stood erect—and with a massive arm outstretched pointed toward the door. It was the commanding attitude of an incensed Pythoness—a Pythoness much contracted vertically, but compensatingly expanded on lateral lines—and it was in the sibilant tones of an incensed python that she uttered the commanding words: “Va-t en!”

A politer phrase might have been used by Madame Beaumelle, but none other that would have made her strong meaning quite so ener-



IT WAS THE COMMANDING ATTITUDE OF AN INCENSED PYTHONESS

JAMES MCCRACKEN 1943



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getically clear. “Get out!” is an adjuration—using that word in its modern colloquial sense—that leaves positively nothing to the imagination of the adjured.

Monsieur Gaillard had no quarrel to make with the peremptoriness of his dismissal. He was more than ready to bring the interview—that, like the têtes, he had found at once amusing and painful—to an end. Even an absurd discord ceases to be ludicrous when it is too pronounced or too prolonged.

“Since Madame so pointedly insists that I must leave her,” he said with a suave courtesy, “I have only to yield to her wishes—merely for an instant pausing to point out to her that my coming to-day, which she now appears to regret, precisely is at one with my going of many years ago: both being wholly of her own will. Having drawn Madame’s attention to this not unimportant fact, I avail myself of her very explicit permission to retire.”

As he thus delivered himself, Monsieur Gaillard bowed with an elegance over his hat and moved to the door. Opening the door, and standing on the threshold with Pierrot beside him, he again bowed with an elegance over his hat. “I have the honor,” he said, respectfully, “to beg that Madame will accept my homages and my

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adieu"; and in a sharper tone added: "Thy manners, Pierrot! Salute!"

Standing on his hind legs with a soldierly erectness, facing Madame Beaumelle with a soldierly exactitude—vastly pleased with his own cleverness, and all unconscious that he thus consummated his master's series of ironic atrocities—Pierrot raised briskly to his forehead his right paw!

THE
RECRUDESCENCE OF MADAME VIC

THE

PECRUDESCENCE OF MADAME VIC

WHEN Madame Vic—widow of the responsible Monsieur Vic, late a baker of substance in the Rue Bausset—described herself as a helpless dove vainly beating against the bars of her cage, it is of a certainty that she used figures of speech with a free tongue. One who is a widow, and appreciably above forty, and a Marseillaise, undoubtedly may claim without challenge a resemblance to creatures of various sorts widely distributed throughout the animal kingdom: but for one so conditioned to claim a resemblance to a dove, and specifically to a helpless dove, is to put a strain dangerously close to the breaking-point upon both the politeness and the imagination of even the Provençaux.

As to her alleged beating against the bars of her cage, that was another matter. There were facts in the case of Madame Vic which gave a colorable quantity of truth to her despairing metaphor. Moreover — and this made them

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harder to deal with—these facts were legal facts: constituting, precisely, the substance of the late Monsieur Vic's will.

"It is not, Monsieur," Madame Vic declared warmly—addressing herself to Monsieur Peloux, as that respected notary carefully refolded the will whereof the reading had been as a discharge of thunderbolts—"that I desire to marry again all in a moment. In truth, after so bitter an experience in matrimony, it is most reasonable—so far from again taking risks of evil—that I should seek to retire myself from the world altogether and become a nun."

"I beg of Madame that she will not become a nun," interposed Monsieur Peloux with a polite gallantry; and added, with a gallantry more subtle, the sententious abstraction: "The convent is the refuge of the ugly and the old."

"It is not, I say, that I desire impetuously to hurl myself into another marriage," Madame Vic continued, acknowledging the notary's handsome speech with an enchanting smile; "it is that I resent having put upon me the insolent command that I am not to marry at all. That—"

"Madame is not wholly accurate in her statement of facts," interrupted Monsieur Peloux, speaking with a notarial precision. "Under the terms of Monsieur Vic's will Madame is free—

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as free as air—to marry instantly the whole world.” Monsieur Peloux waved his hand briskly and expansively: in a manner at once indicative of great rapidity of action, of atmospheric freedom, and of the terrestrial extent of Madame Vic’s matrimonial possibilities.

“And having instantly with the freedom of air married the whole world—what?” Madame Vic asked with a poignant bitterness; and with a like poignant bitterness herself answered: “I receive again precisely the dot that I brought to this bowelless man of stone when in my young innocence I so disastrously wedded him! Precisely that! Not one sou more! All the fruit of my ceaseless toils and of my vigilant economies is wasted. All that justly is mine is snatched away from me. I am left to starve!”

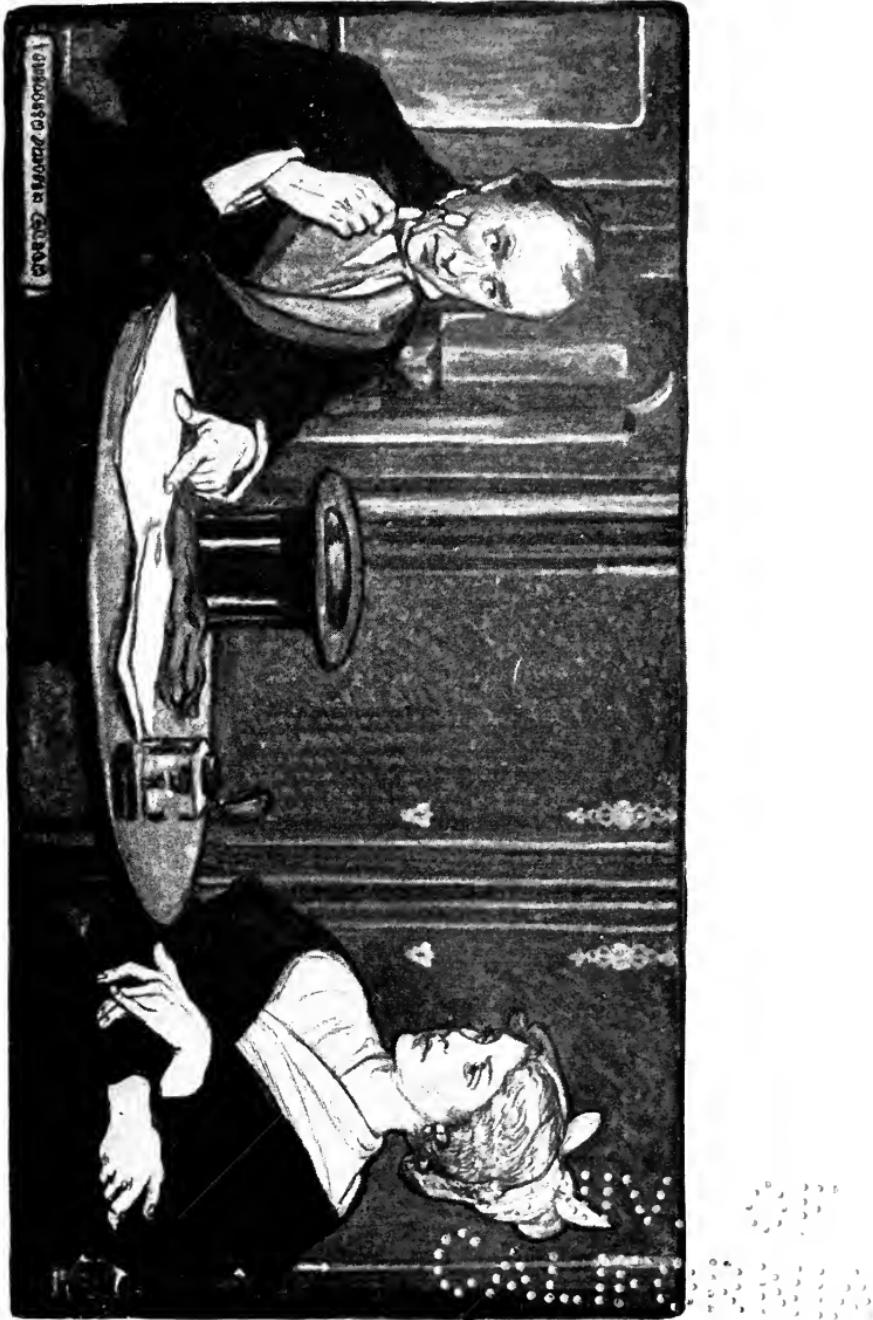
“Pardon—but Madame evidently has not grasped with exactness the conditions which the will imposes upon her. They are both curious and unusual, these conditions. Moreover, being set forth in the language of the law, she reasonably may find them obscure. With Madame’s permission, I will present them to her clearly, in plain words.”

“Monsieur is amiable,” Madame Vic replied with a cold civility. “Of a truth, this will—which Monsieur says is curious and unusual,

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and which I say is monstrous and abominable—is not a hidden mystery. Even my poor wits, which Monsieur no doubt rightly estimates as of a childish weakness”—Monsieur Peloux here made gestures expressive of deprecation—“can make meaning, but not reason, of it. Conceivably however, for the convincing of Monsieur that all is made clear to my meager understanding, it may be well that he puts these despicable orderings and commandings into, as he phrases it, plain words.”

Having thus spoken, Madame Vic ostentatiously disposed herself in an attitude of attention, and emphasized her attentiveness by holding her head a little on one side. With her head that way, even in her anger, Madame Vic distinctly was pleasing to contemplate. She was tall and well rounded and superbly blond, this justly disconsolate widow: of a type—the blending of the fair Phokaian and the massive Roman strains—that is uncommon in Marseille, and therefore is the more appreciated in the rare instances when it arrives. Moreover, she still was on the safe side of the catastrophe that was indicated as imminent by the luxuriant fullness of her bloom. Very soon, beyond question, the fall of the petals would begin: but for the moments remaining before that disaster overtook



MADAME VIC DISPOSED HERSELF IN AN ATTITUDE OF ATTENTION



RECRUDESCENCE OF MADAME VIC

her she had the alluring charm—to pursue the botanical simile—of a lavishly exuberant rose.

In the interest of truth farther to pursue the simile, there were thorns about Madame Vic which equally had reached a very full development. As Monsieur Peloux knew—in common with the world in general—this interesting widow was endowed with an exceptionally high temper and with a most vigorously stubborn will. The fact also was notorious that she had exhibited these characteristics freely in a consistent effort to lead the late Monsieur Vic a dog's life of it; and had succeeded only partially in her strenuous undertaking because that resolute baker had been endowed with a still higher temper and a still more stubborn will of his own.

Monsieur Peloux was of an age, and also of a gravity, but within his body of a notary still was his heart of a man. Forgetting about the thorns—which Monsieur Vic most distinctly had remembered when framing his punitive testament—Monsieur Peloux could not but feel as he regarded Madame Vic, and especially as he regarded her blond head so felicitously at odds with the perpendicular, that a rank injustice had been put upon her under cover of the law. Obviously, to place any restrictions upon the prompt remarriage of such a widow—so nicely balanced

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upon the very apex of maturity; and so soon, toppling thence, to begin her sad progress down the declivity of age—was to do her a substantial wrong.

However, as Monsieur Peloux reflected with satisfaction, it was no affair of his. He was the exponent of the laws, not the maker of them; and in the present instance—since the will was not of his drawing—he was not even colorably responsible for the injury that their too harsh application would set in train. It was therefore as the law's exponent—speaking in the calm voice of the notary, but with an inflection now and then which betrayed his heart of a man—that he set forth freed from legal verbiage the meaning of Monsieur Vic's malevolent testament in these terms:

“So long as Madame remains unmarried out of loving regard for the memory of her late husband”—as this phrase was uttered, and subsequently repeated, Madame Vic disturbed the pleasing poise of her head by tossing it angrily—“the whole of the property possessed by her late husband remains absolutely her own. To her belong without restriction the bakery and the business of the bakery; the moneys invested in securities; the three considerable properties here in Marseille; the pleasing bastide on the hillside

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above St.-Barthélemy; the vineyard at Cassis. In a word, Madame is the possessor of a fortune that will make her very much more than comfortable to the end of her days.” At this point the notary paused.

“Monsieur will have the goodness to continue. If my poor intellect is not at fault there remain other conditions even more odiously insulting than the one which Monsieur has stated. That one is bad enough. It is in a convent, as Monsieur will observe, that I am to enjoy this fine fortune; most of which is of my own making—the fruit, as I have said, of my commendable toils and of my not less commendable economies—and all of which, without any conditions whatever, justly should be mine.”

“To my regret,” said Monsieur Peloux with feeling, “Madame’s late husband, in point of fact, has seen fit to impose other conditions which do materially restrict her freedom of action in the enjoyment of her inheritance.” Monsieur Peloux, his heart of a man asserting itself, heaved a sympathetic sigh.

“Stated in the fewest words,” he continued, “the farther provisions of Monsieur Vic’s will are to this effect: If Madame, out of loving reverence for the memory of her late husband, remains unmarried for the term of five years she

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still shall possess, should she then remarry, three-fourths of the entire estate. Should she marry at the end of three years, one-half of the estate still will be hers; and should she remarry at the end of one year, one-quarter. But should she marry at any time within the year immediately following her late beloved husband's decease, thereby bringing a scandal upon his memory and a disgrace upon— It is needless to pain Madame by repeating the precise wording. In its essence, the meaning is that should Madame remarry within a less period than one year she receives again only her marriage portion and the entire estate is lost to her. As a whole, the property goes to Monsieur Alexis Vic—”

“That unspeakable person no longer is alive,” interrupted Madame Vic in tones of satisfaction. “His quarrelings with Monsieur Vic were malignant; growing out of his effrontery in opposing, because of what he had the temerity to declare was regard for his cousin’s welfare, Monsieur Vic’s marriage. As I perceive now, had his interested slanders been successful, I should have been spared an age of misery. Not being successful, a breaking of relations with him followed of necessity. The partnership in the bakery was dissolved before my calamitous wedding took place. Since that deplorable event

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occurred, twenty years ago, we have had no word with him or with his. They went to Aix—he and his camel of a wife and his ugly little boy—and set up there a contemptible bakery of their own. I have been told that since his death his disgrace of a son has been making ducks and drakes”—Madame Vic’s phrase was faire des ricochets—“of their pittance of a property. It is a providence that his odious plannings to prevent his cousin’s marriage, and so to secure to himself his cousin’s fortune, have not arrived. Thinking that matter over will give him a bad quarter of an hour in—in wherever he deserves to be!”

“But in effect,” said Monsieur Peloux, “his plans have arrived—that is to say, they will arrive should Madame make effective, by remarrying within the ensuing year, the most drastic and the most regrettable of the provisions of Monsieur Vic’s will. She will observe, farther, that should she remarry at the end of the respective terms of one year, of three years, and of five years, the bequests of three-quarters, of one-half, and of one-quarter of the estate to Monsieur Alexis Vic become operative.”

“But Monsieur does not understand. As I have but just now told him, that animal—and equally his camel of a wife—no longer remains alive.”

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“But Madame does not understand. The bequest—my late honored colleague Maître Berteaud was not one to make a mistake so glaring—of course is to Monsieur Alexis Vic and to his heirs. The property—proportionally, or wholly, or not at all: the matter will be governed by Madame’s own actions—will revert to, or will be lost to, Monsieur Alexis Vic’s heirs.”

“It will go to that profligate reptile of a son?”

“Precisely to—I accept Madame’s terms of characterization—that profligate reptile of a son.”

Having thus completed his exposition of the law, Monsieur Peloux remained sympathetically silent. Really, in the circumstances, there was nothing for him to say.

Through some painful moments Madame Vic also was silent—in bitterness of spirit contemplating her own disastrously narrow shoes. She could see no way to widen them: and when at last she spoke it was to utter the words which already I have quoted—with the admission that two-thirds of her metaphor put a strain upon even Provençal imagination and politeness—to the effect that she was a helpless dove beating against the bars of her cage.

That opinions should be divided in the case of Madame Vic was reasonable: there was much to

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be said on both sides. Equally was it reasonable that the line of cleavage should follow the line of sex; that the men should endorse approvingly, and that the women hotly should fly out against, Monsieur Vic's Parthian methods: which settled a score of twenty years' standing by inflicting a wound that rankled before it killed. In Marseille—a city where tongues wag easily—the vigorous interchange of these diverse opinions followed as a matter of course.

"It is an abomination in the sight of men and angels that such wickedness should be permitted," declared Madame Gauthier, a clear-starcher of position, addressing herself to Monsieur Fromagin, proprietor of the flourishing Épicerie Russe. "The atrocity of a will like that is beyond the limits of a dream. Madame Vic has had heaped upon her a whole mountain of wrong!"

Monsieur Fromagin chuckled. "What the angels may think about that matter," he answered politely, "Madame of course is in a better position than I am to know. But when it comes to the men, and especially"—here his politeness wavered—"to the married men, the case is different. Not one of us but holds, as I do, that Monsieur Vic most intelligently has served his widow a fit sauce to the roast that has

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been his unhappy portion through an age of miserable years." Broadly generalizing, and throwing his politeness to the winds bodily, Monsieur Fromagin added: "Widows, at the best, are menaces to the peace of society. They become a shade less dangerous when fitted with close collars and held by short chains."

"Madame Vic slaved constantly for that wretched old man's good and happiness—and every one of the years of misery that she gave him was most richly deserved!" Madame Gauthier responded: speaking with such heat—because of Monsieur Fromagin's infamous generalizations in the matter of widows—that she neglected to weigh, and still less to balance, her angry words.

Without pausing to adjust her conflicting contentions—obviously so radically opposed to each other that if either stood the other must fall—she continued: "It is known throughout the whole universe that Monsieur Vic led that martyred woman a life of weepings; that his ceaseless severities embittered every moment of her anguished days. Monsieur is pleased to assume to express the opinions of the married men upon this legalized iniquity. His dispositions and his experiences being known, those opinions are what I should expect of him. For

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me, I speak for the unfortunate married women; who can hope to find—from the tramplings of a malignant cruelty to which they are subjected unremittingly—only in sorrowing widowhood a somber refuge in which to pass the bitter remnant of their agonized lives."

Madame Gauthier's pointed reference to the grocer's dispositions and experiences made the matter at once personal. As was notorious, Monsieur Fromagin's relations with Madame Fromagin were of a sort to make gall and wormwood seem sweet by comparison. When other matters of talk languished, the quarrelings of this couple afforded always a relishing topic of conversation in the Rue Bausset. Madame Gauthier's thrust, therefore, distinctly was a touch—but in making it she had opened her guard. Having been herself thrice married, her observations upon widowhood were ill-advised.

Discreetly ignoring her touch, Monsieur Fromagin took advantage of her opening. "It is curious to observe," he said, again in the tone of one who generalizes broadly, "how rigorously those trampled-upon unfortunates confine themselves—when they have achieved it—to the sorrowing widowhood that alone affords them, as Madame remarks with propriety, a somber refuge for the bitter remnant of their

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agonized lives. From that somber refuge, as Madame conspicuously is in a position to affirm with authority, all the forces of nature are powerless to drag them forth! If I am not in error, Monsieur Vic's will precisely safeguards his sorrowing widow in that somber refuge where alone, by Madame's own showing, all that is to be hoped for of restful tranquillity is to be found. Also, if again I am not in error, Madame Vic has begun to take her own just precautions to secure herself against the dangerous host of suitors who plan to lure her from her present security into fresh matrimonial pains. It is no doubt as a protector against their aggressive wooings that the handsome young contre-maître for the bakery has been hired."

Monsieur Fromagin also had made a touch—and had lost it by failing to come instantly to a recover. His dragging in of Madame Vic's new foreman was one of those mistaken after-thrusts which too often spoil a fine assault at arms. It gave Madame Gauthier the opportunity to slip over the sharp attack upon herself by parrying neatly the attack upon her friend.

"Monsieur's conceptions of the conduct of a bakery are original," she observed reflectively. "No doubt he would have Madame Vic do her own bakings with her own hands. That would

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be excellent. It is work in which affluent women, owners of bakeries, habitually engage!" In Madame Gauthier's voice there was a fine note of scorn.

"I would have her, for the sake of that propriety to which she is a stranger," Monsieur Fromagin replied with a judicial severity, "employ as a contre-maître a man of a suitable appearance and of a suitable age."

"Monsieur himself, for example?" Madame Gauthier asked sweetly. "It is an arrangement that would be ideal! Many times the thought has occurred to me that Monsieur would be admirable as the almoner of a convent. For him to be the contre-maître in Madame Vic's bakery would be better still. His suitability of age and of appearance equally are unimpeachable. Scandals seeking to approach that bakery would draw back appalled!"

"Madame's parcels are tied and at her service," Monsieur Fromagin responded coldly—and added with a suave venom: "Madame's championship of Madame Vic's—shall we say?—eccentricities, is just. In what remains of Madame's life, even though that remnant is not excessive, events may continue to occur. It is reasonable that she should defend well what so frequently has been her own position—and what

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not impossibly may be her position on occasions yet to arrive. "For me," Monsieur Fromagin's tone became offensively cordial, "my good-will is extended always to Madame's husbands; and shall continue to be extended to them always—as Madame, bravely emerging from her successive somber refuges in sorrowing widowhood, adds to the series and her interesting panorama is prolonged."

Madame Gauthier, carried by her anger beyond all bounds of polite expression, committed the tactical error of lapsing into gross personalities. "At least," she exclaimed in a voice shrill and quivering, "there has not been included in that series a disgustingly ugly old bald-headed man more repulsive than all the beasts of prey—and that, Monsieur, every bit of it, is what you are!"

Having given vent to this ill-judged outburst—whereof the reckless violence was a proclamation that she was routed—Madame Gauthier snatched up her parcels and went out from the *Épicerie Russe* with the lungingly vibrant motion of a furiously enraged hen.

Monsieur Fromagin, left alone among his *épiceries*, chuckled audibly. The outcome of the encounter distinctly was refreshing to his self-respect. In his debates of a similar char-

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acter with Madame Fromagin the laurels usually went the other way.

In the matter of Madame Vic's contre-maître, the consensus of opinion in the Rue Bausset was in line with the views expressed sarcastically by Monsieur Fromagin. Excepting only a few kindly—or, as in the case of Madame Gauthier, interested—apologists, the dwellers in that thoroughfare held that Madame Vic had challenged sharply the convenances by hiring to direct the practical workings of her bakery a foreman at once so handsome and so young. The apologists made the point that the very youth of the contre-maître—he was no more than eight-and-twenty—saved the situation; to which the counterpoint was made that precisely because of his youth the situation was so compromised as virtually to be lost.

The affair being of a piquancy that would have aroused a community the most phlegmatic, the community directly affected by it—among the Marseillais a fight between sparrows will cause a commotion—fairly was set by the ears. As the passing of time gave opportunity for developments which indicated the approach of a crisis, the excitement became intensified. By the third quarter of Madame Vic's first year of

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probation the whole of the Rue Bausset was in ferment. Wagers for and against her winning through that year were made freely. At the Cercle Fraternel des Fils de Phocée, to cover all the contingencies of Monsieur Vic's testament, a tombola was arranged. So far as the Rue Bausset was concerned, a municipal election, with a Red mayor in candidacy, could not have made a greater stir.

Had the outcome of the matter rested solely with Madame Vic—her intentions admittedly being obvious—popular interest would have languished. There would have been no wagering. The tombola tickets would have been left unbought. It was the contre-maître who held the stage. What were his intentions in the premises was an open field for guesswork—and the lively zest of uncertainty remained until they should appear.

“It is credible, most easily credible, that Madame Vic should seek to ensnare her handsome young contre-maître into a marriage of misery,” declared Monsieur Brisson, proprietor of the Pharmacie Centrale, as he prepared for Madame Chabassu her accustomed soothing-potion—to which she habitually had recourse (always a long while after Monsieur Chabassu had perceived that it was urgently necessary)

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when her nervous irritability fairly had passed endurable bounds. "That part of the matter," Monsieur Brisson continued, "makes itself. The part that is incredible beyond imagining is that the contre-maître should suffer himself to be ensnared!"

Actually, Madame Chabassu held this same opinion—but being naturally remonstrant, and most remonstrant when suffering an access of nerves, she promptly scouted it. "Since Madame Vic is neither infirm because of age, nor conspicuously displeasing in appearance," she said with energy, "I am at a loss to perceive why this marriage—more, that is, than marriages in general—should be fraught with misery. Equally am I at a loss to perceive—since the contre-maître, while not old, has arrived at years of discretion—in what respect the possible bridegroom is to be regarded as ensnared. Perhaps Monsieur will have the goodness to explain?"

"My explanation is made by an appeal to Madame's intelligence. Is happiness likely to arrive when an old woman marries a very young man?"

"It is not necessary that Monsieur should put a strain upon my intelligence by inviting me to consider abstractions. At the moment,

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we are speaking of Madame Vic and of her contre-maître. Madame Vic, if Monsieur will suffer me to contradict him flatly, is not an old woman; neither is her contre-maître a very young man."

"I would draw Madame's attention to the fact that such disparity of years as exists between these two renders their marriage not less repulsive than absurd. The immutable laws of society forbid a union so malevolently grotesque."

"Monsieur's knowledge of the immutable laws of society," Madame Chabassu replied dryly, "no doubt is in excess of mine. But I would point out to him that when a man, let us say of Madame Vic's moderate years, marries a somewhat younger woman, let us say of the age of the contre-maître—the two having in prospect a competence, perhaps affluence—I have yet to learn that misery is prophesied as the outcome of the marriage, nor is it usual to suggest that the young woman has been ensnared."

Not being prepared to deal offhand with Madame Chabassu's cleverly massed sophisms, Monsieur Brisson passed them over and attacked her argument in its more obviously weak point. "Did the competence to which Madame refers have even a prospective existence, I should not have the temerity to oppose her reasonings.

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As matters actually stand, I venture to recall to her memory the use that Love habitually makes of the window when Poverty appears at the door. Even were this marriage less revolting in its essence, that substantial objection to it still would remain."

"Monsieur forgets that even her husband's atrocious will cannot deprive Madame Vic of her portion. It is not a large portion, I admit; but, in connection with what the contre-maître himself will possess, it is to be considered. The contre-maître, as is well known, confidently asserts that he is about to inherit a fortune equal to the fortune which Madame Vic, conceivably, may forfeit in whole or in part."

"It is my conviction," said Monsieur Brisson earnestly, "that the contre-maître is of unsound mind. Assuredly, this fortune that he talks about is no more than air. As for Madame Vic's portion, it is—as Madame herself just now has stated—the merest trifle. Briefly, should success attend Madame Vic's brazen wooing of this unfortunate young man—whose mental derangement makes him all the more an object of pity—she will have lured him to a dismal life of poverty with a soon-to-be decrepit old woman, who has a fiend's temper and the stubbornness of ten thousand mules. Her shameless doings,

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Madame, bring a black scandal upon your sex."

By thus in a manner involving Madame Chabassu in the matter, Monsieur Brisson went too far. He invited the personal rejoinder that he received.

"It is evident that Monsieur's conceptions of Madame Vic's character have undergone a change. Little birds have whispered that he himself forced proposals of marriage upon her almost on the day of Monsieur Vic's funeral—certainly before the publication of Monsieur Vic's will. I do him the justice to believe that he would have been less precipitate had he known the conditions which the will imposed."

In referring the announcement of this fact to the whisperings of little birds, Madame Chabassu had spoken with restraint. Actually, Madame Vic herself had proclaimed it, and in terms that had sent a wave of laughter throughout the whole length of the Rue Bausset.

Denial being impossible, Monsieur Brisson had open to him only the course that he took lamely. "My compassionate sorrow for that unhappy old woman," he replied, "I admit led me into an indiscretion. Mercifully, I escaped great misfortune. It is in keeping with your known character, Madame, that you refer in

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terms of derision to an act that was prompted by my goodness of heart."

"My known character is none of your affair, Monsieur," Madame Chabassu answered angrily. "It is not a public matter—as are your merciless dealings with unhappy old women, whom you habitually poison remorselessly by scores!"

Monsieur Brisson visibly shuddered and paled. He was not in the habit of poisoning old women remorselessly by scores; but, undoubtedly, one old woman really had been poisoned by a mistake of his making—and the blight that had fallen upon the Pharmacie Centrale as the result of that unfortunate error had brought him into very narrow shoes. It was, indeed, in the hope of mending his broken fortunes that his precipitate proposal to Madame Vic had been made.

Having controlled his shudder, but remaining pale, the pharmacien replied to Madame Chabassu's taunt with a coarse violence which put him in the wrong. "Madame will do well to reserve her insults for her unfortunate husband. The withering abasements which she puts upon that pitiful man are known to the whole city—equally to his and to her own disgrace. Madame's presence pollutes my respectable premises. She is ordered, I say ordered, to depart!"

"It is with pleasure that I act upon Monsieur's

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polite suggestion," Madame Chabassu answered affably. "No doubt Monsieur contrives his poisonings more agreeably when alone." And having fired this parting shot she retired from the pharmacy in good order—conscious that in their interchange of amenities she very creditably had held her own.

Discreetly ignoring the spirited gossip concerning her indiscretion, Madame Vic maintained in the midst of all the outcry that there was about her an admirable attitude of dignified calm. Conceivably, her calmness was less real than assumed. Certainly, as time went on, even casual observers perceived in her manner an unaccustomed suave tenderness; and careful observers farther perceived an unaccustomed softness in her exceptionally fine—but normally a little too keen—blue eyes.

Monsieur Peloux, whose observations of Madame Vic were of a critical nicety, regarded these phenomena with interest. Being of a reticent habit, and of a profession that discourages tattling, he made no audible comment upon them; but the deductions which his intelligent mind drew from such exhibitions of unusual, and even unnatural, tenderness found expression now and then in a half-cynical smile.

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The point toward which she was heading he perceived clearly. What would happen to her when she got there he found less clear. But certainly, he reasoned, should the young baker be, as the old baker had been, a man of domineering temperament and pig-headed obstinacy, then would her venture land Madame Vic—who possessed precisely the same pleasing characteristics—in a veritable bed of thorns. With a fortune in hand, she would have a young husband to some extent in hand also; but the matter would take another color if in her haste to gain her young husband she should cast her fortune to the winds. Monsieur Peloux's smile over this combination of possibilities, as I have said, was only half cynical. There seemed to him to be a touch of pathos in Madame Vic's eagerness to clutch at her fleeting chances of happiness—and all for love to hold her bakery, and the remainder of her substantial possessions, well lost!

The possible saving grace in the situation—upon which Madame Vic relied confidently, but upon which the professionally distrustful notary refused to place any reliance whatever—was the positive and persistent assertion of the contre-maître (touched on by Madame Chabassu in the course of her animated conversation with the pharmacien) that he himself was about to

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inherit a fortune that would range him effectively in the world. Beyond this broad generalization he refused point-blank to go. Even Madame Vic—when matters had got to a pass when they could talk freely—could not wring from him a more definite statement than that the fortune which he stood to win certainly would equal the fortune which she stood to lose.

The vagueness of the contre-maître's profession, Monsieur Peloux argued, made it ridiculous.

The sincerity of tone and manner that accompanied it, Madame Vic argued, made it as credible as though the fortune had been exhibited concrete in houses and lands.

Actually, this intelligent widow was of a thrifty habit and had a marked aptitude for affairs. Temporarily, without doubt, the admirable normal adjustment of her reasoning faculties was disturbed by the too free play of her emotions. But, in spite of such disturbance, had she not been convinced of the truth of the contre-maître's profession—had she for one moment believed that her choice lay between a marriage sauced with poverty, and celibacy sauced with a comfortable amount of wealth—her emotions instantly would have been ousted by her rallying reason, and the contre-maître would have been whistled down the wind. She distinctly did

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not believe that those displeasing alternatives confronted her. On the contrary, she believed—even allowing for the loss of her inheritance—that love and riches smilingly approached her hand in hand. Undoubtedly, too, the resolute reticence of the contre-maître in regard to the riches counted with her for almost as much as did his conspicuous lack of reticence—he was a most refreshingly energetic lover—in regard to the love. From a feminine standpoint, the element of mystery gave zest to her venture by casting over it the alluring glamour of romance.

Monsieur Peloux—instinctively distrusting mysteries and having no feeling for romance—would have none of all this airily fanciful reasoning. In the privacy of his own mind he admitted that young men have been known to be infatuated—such was the impolite word that he used in his thought—with elderly women; and even, after marriage, to remain infatuated with their elderly wives. But he argued that such cases are unusual; and he farther, and more to the heart of the matter, argued that Madame Vic's most marked characteristics were not of the sort—when revealed by intimate acquaintance—to invite infatuation: still less to encourage even a very thoroughgoing variety of that form of temporary madness to endure. He decided, there-

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fore, that the contre-maître was playing, for his own purpose, a game of some sort that in the end must work Madame Vic harm.

Acting on this conclusion, and speaking in the capacity of her legal adviser, he ventured to urge his interesting client to save at least the beggarly fourth of her inheritance by rounding out the first and the shortest of Monsieur Vic's several probationary terms. His disinterested attempt to minister to Madame Vic's welfare was so ill received that he was forced to abandon it: with the reflection that when a woman fairly grips the bit between her teeth—and notably when the woman, being no longer young, takes to bit-biting in love matters—there is nothing left but to drop the reins.

A month less than the full year sequent to the removal of Monsieur Vic from his respectable bakery in the Rue Bausset to his respectable lot in the Cemetery of Saint Pierre, Monsieur Polverel—favorably and widely known throughout the Midi in commercial circles—came in the course of his commercial travelings to Marseille. As always, he stopped at the Grand Hôtel du Paradis. To his surprise, politely concealed, he found Monsieur and Madame Chabassu, the host and hostess of that well-conducted estab-

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lishment, actually laughing together: precisely as though family jangles in the Grand Hôtel du Paradis were quite unknown. In justice to the worthy Chabassu the fact must be stated that these little domestic disamenities never were of his provoking. It was Madame Chabassu who had always the sharpened tongue.

"There is news to tell Monsieur that is supremely amusing," Chabassu declared delightedly while still shaking the commercial traveler's hand. "It is the most exquisite pleasantry that ever has been known in the Rue Bausset. Monsieur will laugh over it until he cries!"

"What has happened is droll beyond imagining," struck in Madame Chabassu, in haste to be first to tell about it. "The marriage between Madame Vic and her young contre-maître has arrived!"

"Good!" replied Monsieur Polverel. "It is what I looked for. My wager was well taken. I have won my ten francs. Truly, the joke is excellent. And the contre-maître? He marches well in the leading-strings held by his elderly bride?"

"It is the contre-maître who holds the leading-strings," Chabassu chuckled. "How the elderly bride marches in them is another affair!"

Monsieur Polverel looked puzzled. That he

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should look puzzled was what was expected of him. Monsieur and Madame Chabassu laughed.

"Ah, he is a deep one, the contre-maître," said Chabassu with conviction. "He follows well his race! That sharp young man, Monsieur, wisely made his sacrifices—that nothing might be left to chance. By marrying Madame Vic himself, and within the year, he composed the whole matter in a manner the most secure. The old Vic himself must be grinning by the hour over it—the old Vic, up there in the Cemetery of Saint Pierre!"

"That the contre-maître is—as the old Vic was—a brute and a deceiver, is unquestionable," Madame Chabassu interposed. "They say that when Madame Vic made her outcry at the Mairie he was as the old Vic alive again! He took her aside and whispered to her—what cruelties he uttered were not heard, but they may be imagined—and she went pale suddenly, and then was silent and cowed. Precisely the same used to happen when things came to a grave issue in the old Vic's time. When the old Vic's temper was up he was as an incarnate fiend! As for that part of the matter, it is outrageous. But it is to be supposed"—Madame Chabassu here pointedly addressed Monsieur Chabassu—"that thou

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shouldst find such deceivings and such cruelties amusing—thou!"

Monsieur Polverel opened his mouth to speak, but opportunity for speech was not given him.

"My angel," said the excellent Chabassu, "it is not I who would smile at such matters did they arrive in the ordinary way. Deceivings are not to my liking; and as to harshness, thou knowest that even when that nimble tongue of thine goes too quickly I am patient with thee—being sure always of the goodness of thy good heart."

"I will admit," replied Madame Chabassu guardedly, "that thou art not a brute always."

"My treasure, thy abounding merits so endear thee to me that I should be not less than a wild beast were I other with thee than considerately tender. Wert thou, as Madame Vic is, overbearing and ill-tempered thou wouldest find me a very different man!" These resolute words were spoken by the brave Chabassu in a tone of menace that caused Madame Chabassu to smile tolerantly; and that compelled Monsieur Polverel—to whom the customs of the family were no secret—to disguise a sudden snicker with an equally sudden and rather awkward cough.

"But in this case of Madame Vic," Chabassu

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continued, “ it is altogether another affair. Her old first husband, assuredly, put severities upon her, but that she invited them by provoking him beyond all endurance is known to the whole world. Of a certainty, her young second husband—whom she has taken in such unseemly haste—is but helping with his fresh severities to settle what Monsieur Vic looked upon, his will proves it, as an unsettled score.”

“ My good Chabassu,” urged Monsieur Polverel, “ I am in a sea of bewilderments. Tell me—”

“ In taking any husband, in haste or slowly,” said Madame Chabassu, going off at a tangent hotly, “ the common decencies of life required that she should have commanded her wedding breakfast of us—here in the Grand Hôtel du Paradis. To command her breakfast of Monsieur Brégaillon was to affront us openly. For years we have bought our bread from the Vic bakery. We buy our bread from the Vic bakery no more! I will not deny that in the case of a woman so perfidious her old husband was justified in setting for her a snare.”

Again Monsieur Polverel opened his mouth—and again closed it as Chabassu took the word.

“ As ever, thou bright star of my affections, thou hast reason. Into the snare that rightly,

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as thou sayest, was set for her, she walked with her eyes open and of her own free will. That bombshells of retribution—of retribution the most complete and the most astonishing—instantly should explode around her was no more than she deserved. Her conduct in the matter of the breakfast was a hideous treachery. It is fitting that upon a woman capable of that treachery an outraged Heaven should descend punishments the blackest and the most severe. What has happened”—Chabassu spoke with the air of one whose advice an outraged Heaven had asked and taken—“has my approval, all entire!”

“M’sieu-Madame,” Monsieur Polverel asked in tones of earnest entreaty, “I beg of you that this enigma may be made clear to me without more words. How is it possible that the contre-maître has gained anything for himself by marrying Madame Vic? How is it possible that he holds that violent woman in leading-strings? In what manner can he be settling Monsieur Vic’s scores? What are the bombshells of retribution which have exploded? Why should Monsieur Vic be grinning over it all in his grave? In a word, M’sieu-Madame, what is the explanation of this maze of mysteries and contradictions—in which everything is as un-

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reasonable and as impossible as in the most defiantly incredible of dreams?"

"The explanation, Monsieur," Chabassu answered, his fine stomach shaking with the laughter that gurgled in his voice, "is of a simplicity. At the Mairie, when they signed upon the register—not one moment sooner: the revelation came as a bolt of thunder—Madame Vic discovered that in spite of her new marriage she still carried her old name!"

The expression of hopelessness upon Monsieur Polverel's face became almost pathetic. "In one more moment, my good Chabassu," he said in a tone of despondent weariness, "I shall go entirely mad!"

"Surely Monsieur must understand?"

"I understand nothing. It is impossible of such confusions to make either head or tail."

Madame Chabassu came to Monsieur Polverel's rescue. "It was the young Vic whom Madame Vic married. Absolutely, the young Vic himself! And now Monsieur perceives?"

"The young Vic?" queried Monsieur Polverel. "How then could it be the contre-maître? I do not perceive at all!"

"It is that, Monsieur," put in Chabassu, "which makes the matter so entirely droll. The two—the young Vic and the contre-maître—



THEN, AT LAST, MONSIEUR POLVEREL SAW DAYLIGHT

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identically are one. In marrying her contre-maître, Madame Vic married precisely the heir under Monsieur Vic's will to whom was to fall everything should she marry any one at all within the year!"

Then, at last, Monsieur Polverel saw daylight. He slapped his thigh resoundingly and laughed as only a commis-voyageur can laugh. "That young Vic," he said brokenly, but in tones of deep conviction, "is the most perfect of farceurs!"

"Absolutely, it is a joke of the most refined completeness," Chabassu responded. "Madame Vic, again being married, again is bridled and bitted. At the end of the venture she finds herself, in the essence of the matter, where she was at the start!"

"And she remains—" began Monsieur Polverel.

"As always," Chabassu interrupted with a chuckle, "she remains—Madame Vic!"

MADAME JOLICŒUR'S CAT

MADAME JOLICŒUR'S CAT

BEING somewhat of an age, and a widow of dignity — the late Monsieur Jolicœur had held the responsible position under Government of Ingénieur des Ponts et Chaussées—yet being also of a provocatively fresh plumpness, and a Marseillaise, it was of necessity that Madame Veuve Jolicœur, on being left lonely in the world save for the companionship of her adored Shah de Perse, should entertain expectations of the future that were antipodal and antagonistic: on the one hand, of an austere life suitable to a widow of a reasonable maturity and of an assured position; on the other hand, of a life, not austere, suitable to a widow still of a provocatively fresh plumpness and by birth a Marseillaise.

Had Madame Jolicœur possessed a severe temperament and a resolute mind—possessions inherently improbable, in view of her birthplace —she would have made her choice between these equally possible futures with a promptness and with a finality that would have left nothing

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at loose ends. So endowed, she would have emphasized her not excessive age by a slightly excessive gravity of dress and of deportment; and would have adorned it, and her dignified widowhood, by becoming *dévote*: and thereafter, clinging with a modest ostentation only to her piety, would have radiated, as time made its marches, an always increasingly exemplary grace. But as Madame Jolicœur did not possess a temperament that even bordered on severity, and as her mind was of a sort that made itself up in at least twenty different directions in a single moment—as she was, in short, an entirely typical and therefore an entirely delightful Provençale—the situation was so much too much for her that, by the process of formulating a great variety of irreconcilable conclusions, she left everything at loose ends by not making any choice at all.

In effect, she simply stood attendant upon what the future had in store for her: and meanwhile avowedly clung only, in default of piety, to her adored Shah de Perse—to whom was given, as she declared in disconsolate negligence of her still provocatively fresh plumpness, all of the bestowable affection that remained in the devastated recesses of her withered heart.

To preclude any possibility of compromising

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misunderstanding, it is but just to Madame Jolicœur to explain at once that the personage thus in receipt of the contingent remainder of her blighted affections—far from being, as his name would suggest, an Oriental potentate temporarily domiciled in Marseille to whom she had taken something more than a passing fancy—was a Persian superb black cat; and a cat of such rare excellencies of character and of acquirements as fully to deserve all of the affection that any heart of the right sort—withered, or otherwise—was disposed to bestow upon him.

Cats of his perfect beauty, of his perfect grace, possibly might be found, Madame Jolicœur grudgingly admitted, in the Persian royal catgeries; but nowhere else in the Orient, and nowhere at all in the Occident, she declared with an energetic conviction, possibly could there be found a cat who even approached him in intellectual development, in wealth of interesting accomplishments, and, above all, in natural sweetness of disposition—a sweetness so marked that even under extreme provocation he never had been known to thrust out an angry paw. This is not to say that the Shah de Perse was a characterless cat, a lymphatic nonentity. On occasion—usually in connection with food that was distasteful to him—he could have his re-

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sentments; but they were manifested always with a dignified restraint. His nearest approach to ill-mannered abruptness was to bat with a contemptuous paw the offending morsel from his plate; which brusque act he followed by fixing upon the bestower of unworthy food a coldly, but always politely, contemptuous stare. Ordinarily, however, his displeasure—in the matter of unsuitable food, or in other matters—was exhibited by no more overt action than his retirement to a corner—he had his choices in corners, governed by the intensity of his feelings—and there seating himself with his back turned scornfully to an offending world. Even in his kindliest corner, on such occasions, the expression of his scornful back was as a whole volume of wingéd words!

But the rare little cat tantrums of the Shah de Perse—if to his so gentle excesses may be applied so strong a term—were but as sun-spots on the effulgence of his otherwise constant amiability. His regnant desires, by which his worthy little life was governed, were to love and to please. He was the most cuddlesome cat, Madame Joli-cœur unhesitatingly asserted, that ever had lived; and he had a purr—softly thunderous and winningly affectionate—that was in keeping with his cuddlesome ways. When, of his own

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volition, he would jump into her abundant lap and go to burrowing with his little soft round head beneath her soft round elbows, the while gurglingly purring forth his love for her, Madame Jolicœur, quite justifiably, at times was moved to tears. Equally was his sweet nature exhibited in his always eager willingness to show off his little train of cat accomplishments. He would give his paw with a courteous grace to any lady or gentleman—he drew the caste line rigidly—who asked for it. For his mistress, he would spring to a considerable height and clutch with his two soft paws—never by any mistake scratching—her outstretched wrist, and so would remain suspended while he delicately nibbled from between her fingers her edible offering. For her, he would make an almost painfully real pretense of being a dead cat: extending himself upon the rug with an exaggeratedly death-like rigidity—and so remaining until her command to be alive again brought him briskly to rub himself, rising on his hind legs and purring mellowly, against her comfortable knees.

All of these interesting tricks, with various others that may be passed over, he would perform with a lively zest whenever set at them by a mere word of prompting; but his most notable trick was a game in which he engaged with his

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mistress not at word of command, but—such was his intelligence—simply upon her setting the signal for it. The signal was a close-fitting white cap—to be quite frank, a night-cap—that she tied upon her head when it was desired that the game should be played.

It was of the game that Madame Jolicœur should assume her cap with an air of detachment and aloofness: as though no such entity as the Shah de Perse existed, and with an insisted-upon disregard of the fact that he was watching her alertly with his great, golden eyes. Equally was it of the game that the Shah de Perse should affect—save for his alert watching—a like disregard of the doings of Madame Jolicœur: usually by an ostentatious pretense of washing his upraised hind leg, or by a like pretense of scrubbing behind his ears. These conventions duly having been observed, Madame Jolicœur would seat herself in her especial easy-chair, above the relatively high back of which her night-capped head a little rose. Being so seated, always with the air of aloofness and detachment, she would take a book from the table and make a show of becoming absorbed in its contents. Matters being thus advanced, the Shah de Perse would make a show of becoming absorbed in searchings for an imaginary mouse—but so

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would conduct his fictitious quest for that supposititious animal as eventually to achieve for himself a strategic position close behind Madame Jolicœur's chair. Then, dramatically, the pleasing end of the game would come: as the Shah de Perse—leaping with the distinguishing grace and lightness of his Persian race—would flash upward and “surprise” Madame Jolicœur by crowning her white-capped head with his small black person, all a-shake with triumphant purrs! It was a charming little comedy—and so well understood by the Shah de Perse that he never ventured to essay it under other, and more intimate, conditions of night-cap use; even as he never failed to engage in it with spirit when his white lure properly was set for him above the back of Madame Jolicœur's chair. It was as though to the Shah de Perse the white night-cap of Madame Jolicœur, displayed in accordance with the rules of the game, were an oriflamme: akin to, but in minor points differing from, the helmet of Navarre.

Being such a cat, it will be perceived that Madame Jolicœur had reason in her avowed intention to bestow upon him all of the bestowable affection remnant in her withered heart's devastated recesses; and, equally, that she would not be wholly desolate, having such a cat to comfort

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her, while standing impartially attendant upon the decrees of fate.

To assert that any woman not conspicuously old and quite conspicuously of a fresh plumpness could be left in any city isolate, save for a cat's company, while the fates were spinning new threads for her, would be to put a severe strain upon credulity. To make that assertion specifically of Madame Jolicœur, and specifically—of all cities in the world!—of Marseille, would be to strain credulity fairly to the breaking point. On the other hand, to assert that Madame Jolicœur, in defense of her isolation, was disposed to plant machine-guns in the doorway of her dwelling—a house of modest elegance on the Pavé d'Amour, at the crossing of the Rue Bausset—would be to go too far. Nor indeed—aside from the fact that the presence of such engines of destruction would not have been tolerated by the other residents of the quietly respectable Pavé d'Amour—was Madame Jolicœur herself, as has been intimated, temperamentally inclined to go to such lengths as machine-guns in maintenance of her somewhat waveringly desired privacy in a merely cat-enlivened solitude.

Between these widely separated extremes of conjectural possibility lay the mediate truth of

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the matter: which truth—thus resembling precious gold in its valueless rock matrix—lay embedded in, and was to be extracted from, the irresponsible utterances of the double row of loosely hung tongues, always at hot wagging, ranged along the two sides of the Rue Bausset.

Madame Jouval, a milliner of repute—delivering herself with the generosity due to a good customer from whom an order for a trousseau was a not unremote possibility, yet with the acumen perfected by her professional experiences—summed her views of the situation, in talk with Madame Vic, proprietor of the Vic bakery, in these words: “It is of the convenances, and equally is it of her own melancholy necessities, that this poor Madame retires for a season to sorrow in a suitable seclusion in the company of her sympathetic cat. Only in such retreat can she give vent fitly to her desolating grief. But after storm comes sunshine: and I am happily assured by her less despairing appearance, and by the new mourning that I have been making for her, that even now, from the bottomless depth of her affliction, she looks beyond the storm.”

“I well believe it!” snapped Madame Vic. “That the appearance of Madame Jolicœur at any time has been despairing is a matter that

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has escaped my notice. As to the mourning that she now wears, it is a defiance of all propriety. Why, with no more than that of color in her frock"—Madame Vic upheld her thumb and finger infinitesimally separated—"and with a mere pin-point of a flower in her bonnet, she would be fit for the opera!"

Madame Vic spoke with a caustic bitterness that had its roots. Her own venture in second marriage had been catastrophic—so catastrophic that her neglected bakery had gone very much to the bad. Still more closely to the point, Madame Jolicœur—incident to finding entomologic specimens misplaced in her breakfast-rolls—had taken the leading part in an interchange of incivilities with the bakery's proprietor, and had withdrawn from it her custom.

"And even were her mournings not a flouting of her short year of widowhood," continued Madame Vic, with an acrimony that abbreviated the term of widowhood most unfairly—"the scores of eligible suitors who openly come streaming to her door, and are welcomed there, are as trumpets proclaiming her audacious intentions and her indecorous desires. Even Monsieur Brisson is in that outrageous procession! Is it not enough that she should entice a repulsively bald-headed notary and an old rake of a

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major to make their brazen advances, without suffering this anatomy of a pharmacien to come treading on their heels?—he with his hands imbrued in the life-blood of the unhappy old woman whom his mismade prescription sent in agony to the tomb! Pah! I have no patience with her! She and her grief and her seclusion and her sympathetic cat, indeed! It all is a tragedy of indiscretion—that shapes itself as a revolting farce!"

It will be observed that Madame Vic, in framing her bill of particulars, practically reduced her alleged scores of Madame Jolicœur's suitors to precisely two—since the bad third was handicapped so heavily by that notorious matter of the mismade prescription as to be a negligible quantity, quite out of the race. Indeed, it was only the preposterous temerity of Monsieur Brisson—despairingly clutching at any chance to retrieve his broken fortunes—that put him in the running at all. With the others, in such slighting terms referred to by Madame Vic—Monsieur Peloux, a notary of standing, and the Major Gontard, of the Twenty-ninth of the Line—the case was different. It had its sides.

"That this worthy lady reasonably may desire again to wed," declared Monsieur Fromagin, actual proprietor of the Épicerie Russe—an

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establishment liberally patronized by Madame Jolicœur—"is as true as that when she goes to make her choosings between these estimable gentlemen she cannot make a choice that is wrong."

Madame Gauthier, a clear-starcher of position, to whom Monsieur Fromagin thus addressed himself, was less broadly positive. "That is a matter of opinion," she answered; and added: "To go no farther than the very beginning, Monsieur should perceive that her choice has exactly fifty chances in the hundred of going wrong: lying, as it does, between a meager, sallow-faced creature of a death-white baldness, and a fine big pattern of a man, strong and ruddy, with a close-clipped but abundant thatch on his head, and a mustache that admittedly is superb!"

"Ah, there speaks the woman!" said Monsieur Fromagin, with a patronizing smile distinctly irritating. "Madame will recognize—if she will but bring herself to look a little beyond the mere outside—that what I have advanced is not a matter of opinion but of fact. Observe: Here is Monsieur Peloux—to whose trifling leanness and aristocratic baldness the thoughtful give no attention—easily a notary in the very first rank. As we all know, his services are sought in cases of the most exigent importance—"

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"For example," interpolated Madame Gauthier, "the case of the insurance solicitor, in whose countless defraudings my own brother was a sufferer: a creature of a vileness, whose deserts were unnumbered ages of dungeons—and who, thanks to the chicaneries of Monsieur Peloux, at this moment walks free as air!"

"It is of the professional duty of advocates," replied Monsieur Fromagin, sententiously, "to defend their clients; on the successful discharge of that duty—irrespective of minor details—depends their fame. Madame neglects the fact that Monsieur Peloux, by his masterly conduct of the case that she specifies, won for himself from his legal colleagues an immense applause."

"The more shame to his legal colleagues!" commented Madame Gauthier curtly.

"But leaving that affair quite aside," continued Monsieur Fromagin airily, but with insistence, "here is this notable advocate who reposes his important homages at Madame Jolicœur's feet: he a man of an age that is suitable, without being excessive; who has in the community an assured position; whose more than moderate wealth is known. I insist, therefore, that should she accept his homages she would do well."

"And I insist," declared Madame Gauthier

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stoutly, “that should she turn her back upon the Major Gontard she would do most ill!”

“Madame a little disregards my premises,” Monsieur Fromagin spoke in a tone of forbearance, “and therefore a little argues—it is the privilege of her sex—against the air. Distinctly, I do not exclude from Madame Jolicœur’s choice that gallant Major: whose rank—now approaching him to the command of a regiment, and fairly equaling the position at the bar achieved by Monsieur Peloux—has been won, grade by grade, by deeds of valor in his African campaignings which have made him conspicuous even in the army that stands first in such matters of all the armies of the world. Moreover—although, admittedly, in that way Monsieur Peloux makes a better showing—he is of an easy affluence. On the Camargue he has his excellent estate in vines, from which comes a revenue more than sufficing to satisfy more than modest wants. At Les Martigues he has his charming coquette villa, smothered in the flowers of his own planting, to which at present he makes his agreeable escapes from his military duties; and in which, when his retreat is taken, he will pass softly his sunset years. With these substantial points in his favor, the standing of the Major Gontard in this matter practically is of a parity with the

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standing of Monsieur Peloux. Equally, both are worthy of Madame Jolicœur's consideration: both being able to continue her in the life of elegant comfort to which she is accustomed; and both being on a social plane—it is of her level accurately—to which the widow of an ingénieur des ponts et chaussées neither steps up nor steps down. Having now made clear, I trust, my reasonings, I repeat the proposition with which Madame took issue: When Madame Jolicœur goes to make her choosings between these estimable gentlemen she cannot make a choice that is wrong."

"And I repeat, Monsieur," said Madame Gauthier, lifting her basket from the counter, "that in making her choosings Madame Jolicœur either goes to raise herself to the heights of a matured happiness, or to plunge herself into bald-headed abysses of despair. Yes, Monsieur, that far apart are her choosings!" And Madame Gauthier added, in communion with herself as she passed to the street with her basket: "As for me, it would be that adorable Major by a thousand times!"

As was of reason, since hers was the first place in the matter, Madame Jolicœur herself carried on debatings—in the portion of her heart that

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had escaped complete devastation—identical in essence with the debatings of her case which went up and down the Rue Bausset.

Not having become *dévote*—in the year and more of opportunity open to her for a turn in that direction—one horn of her original dilemma had been eliminated, so to say, by atrophy. Being neglected, it had withered: with the practical result that out of her very indecisions had come a decisive choice. But to her new dilemma, of which the horns were the Major and the Notary—in the privacy of her secret thoughts she made no bones of admitting that this dilemma confronted her—the atrophying process was not applicable; at least, not until it could be applied with a sharp finality. Too long dallied with, it very well might lead to the atrophy of both of them in dudgeon; and thence onward, conceivably, to her being left to cling only to the Shah de Perse for all the remainder of her days.

Therefore, to the avoidance of that too radical conclusion, Madame Jolicœur engaged in her debatings briskly: offering to herself, in effect, the balanced arguments advanced by Monsieur Fromagin in favor equally of Monsieur Peloux and of the Major Gontard; taking as her own, with moderating exceptions and emenda-

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tions, the views of Madame Gauthier as to the meagerness and pallid baldness of the one and the sturdiness and gallant bearing of the other; considering, from the standpoint of her own personal knowledge in the premises, the Notary's disposition toward a secretive reticence that bordered upon severity, in contrast with the cordially frank and debonair temperament of the Major; and, at the back of all, keeping well in mind the fundamental truths that opportunity ever is evanescent and that time ever is on the wing.

As the result of her debatings, and not less as the result of experience gained in her earlier campaigning, Madame Jolicœur took up a strategic position nicely calculated to inflame the desire for, by assuming the uselessness of, an assault. In set terms, confirming particularly her earlier and more general avowal, she declared equally to the Major and to the Notary that absolutely the whole of her bestowable affection—of the remnant in her withered heart available for distribution—was bestowed upon the Shah de Perse: and so, with an alluring nonchalance, left them to draw the logical conclusion that their strivings to win that desirable quantity were idle—since a definite disposition of it already had been made.

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The reply of the Major Gontard to this declaration was in keeping with his known amiability, but also was in keeping with his military habit of command. "Assuredly," he said, "Madame shall continue to bestow, within reason, her affections upon Monsieur le Shah; and with them that brave animal—he is a cat of ten thousand—shall have my affections as well. Already, knowing my feeling for him, we are friends—as Madame shall see to her own convincing." Addressing himself in tones of kindly persuasion to the Shah de Perse, he added: "Viens, Monsieur!"—whereupon the Shah de Perse instantly jumped himself to the Major's knee and broke forth, in response to a savant rubbing of his soft little jowls, into his gurgling purr. "Voilà, Madame!" continued the Major. "It is to be perceived that we have our good understandings, the Shah de Perse and I. That we all shall live happily together tells itself without words. But observe"—of a sudden the voice of the Major thrilled with a deep earnestness, and his style of address changed to a familiarity that only the intensity of his feeling condoned—"I am resolved that to me, above all, shall be given thy dear affections. Thou shalt give me the perfect flower of them—of that fact rest thou assured. In thy heart I am to be the very first—even as

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this flagrantly untruthful statement—"and with this admirable cat, so dear to Madame, it goes to make itself that we speedily become enduring friends."

Curiously enough—a mere coincidence, of course—as the Notary uttered these words so sharply at points with veracity, in the very moment of them, the Shah de Perse stiffly retired into his sulkiest corner and turned what had every appearance of being a scornful back upon the world.

Judiciously ignoring this inopportunely equivocal incident, Monsieur Peloux reverted to the matter in chief and concluded his deliverance in these words: "I well understand, I repeat, that Madame for the moment makes a comedy of herself and of her cat for my amusing. But I persuade myself that her droll fancyings will not be lasting, and that she will be serious with me in the end. Until then—and then most of all—I am at her feet humbly: an unworthy, but a very earnest, suppliant for her good-will. Should she have the cruelty to refuse my supplication, it will remain with me to die in an unmerited despair!"

Certainly, this was an appeal—of a sort. But even without perceiving the mitigating subtlety of its comminative final clause—so

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skilfully worded as to leave Monsieur Peloux free to bring off his threatened unmeritedly despairing death quite at his own convenience—Madame Jolicœur did not find it satisfying. In contrast with the Major Gontard's ringingly audacious declarations of his habits in dealing with fortresses, she felt that it lacked force. And, also—this, of course, was a sheer weakness—she permitted herself to be influenced appreciably by the indicated preferences of the Shah de Perse: who had jumped to the knee of the Major with an affectionate alacrity; and who undeniably had turned on the Notary—either by chance or by intention—a back of scorn.

As the general outcome of these several developments, Madame Jolicœur's debatings came to have in them—if I so may state the trend of her mental activities—fewer bald heads and more mustaches; and her never severely set purpose to abide in a loneliness relieved only by the Shah de Perse was abandoned root and branch.

While Madame Jolicœur continued her debatings—which, in their modified form, manifestly were approaching her to conclusions—water was running under bridges elsewhere.

In effect, her hesitations produced a period of suspense that gave opportunity for, and by the

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exasperating delay of it stimulated, the resolution of the Notary's dark thoughts into darker deeds. With reason, he did not accept at its face value Madame Jolicœur's declaration touching the permanent bestowal of her remnant affections; but he did believe that there was enough in it to make the Shah de Perse a delaying obstacle to his own acquisition of them. When obstacles got in this gentleman's way it was his habit to kick them out of it—a habit that had not been unduly stunted by half a lifetime of successful practice at the criminal bar.

Because of his professional relations with them, Monsieur Peloux had an extensive acquaintance among criminals of varying shades of intensity—at times, in his dubious doings, they could be useful to him—hidden away in the shadowy nooks and corners of the city; and he also had his emissaries through whom they could be reached. All the conditions thus standing attendant upon his convenience, it was a facile matter for him to make an appointment with one of these disreputables at a cabaret of bad record in the Quartier de la Tourette: a region—bordering upon the north side of the Vieux Port—that is at once the oldest and the foulest quarter of Marseille.

In going to keep this appointment—as was his

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habit on such occasions, in avoidance of possible spying upon his movements—he went deviously: taking a cab to the Bassin de Carènage, as though some maritime matter engaged him, and thence making the transit of the Vieux Port in a bateau mouche. It was while crossing in the ferryboat that a sudden shuddering beset him: as he perceived with horror—but without repentance—the pit into which he descended. In his previous, always professional, meetings with criminals his position had been that of unassailable dominance. In his pending meeting—since he himself would be not only a criminal but an inciter to crime—he would be, in the essence of the matter, the under dog. Beneath his seemly black hat his bald head went whiter than even its normal deathly whiteness, and perspiration started from its every pore. Almost with a groan, he removed his hat and dried with his handkerchief what were in a way his tears of shame.

Over the interview between Monsieur Peloux and his hireling—cheerfully moistened, on the side of the hireling, with absinthe of a vileness in keeping with its place of purchase—decency demands the partial drawing of a veil. In brief, Monsieur Peloux—his guilty eyes averted, the shame-tears streaming afresh from his bald head—presented his criminal demand and stated

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the sum that he would pay for its gratification. This sum—being in keeping with his own estimate of what it paid for—was so much in excess of the hireling's views concerning the value of a mere cat-killing that he fairly jumped at it.

“Be not disturbed, Monsieur!” he replied, with the fervor of one really grateful, and with the expansive extravagance of a Marseillais keyed up with exceptionally bad absinthe. “Be not disturbed in the smallest! In this very coming moment this camel of a cat shall die a thousand deaths; and in but another moment immeasurable quantities of salt and ashes shall obliterate his justly despicable grave! To an instant accomplishment of Monsieur’s wishes I pledge whole-heartedly the word of an honest man.”

Actually—barring the number of deaths to be inflicted on the Shah de Perse, and the needlessly defiling concealment of his burial-place—this radical treatment of the matter was precisely what Monsieur Peloux desired; and what, in terms of innuendo and euphuism, he had asked for. But the brutal frankness of the hireling, and his evident delight in sinning for good wages, came as an arousing shock to the enfeebled remnant of the Notary’s better nature—with a re-

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sulting vacillation of purpose to which he would have risen superior had he been longer habituated to the ways of crime.

"No! No!" he said weakly. "I did not mean that—by no means all of that. At least—that is to say—you will understand me, my good man, that enough will be done if you remove the cat from Marseille. Yes, that is what I mean—take it somewhere. Take it to Cassis, to Arles, to Avignon—where you will—and leave it there. The railway ticket is my charge—and, also, you have an extra napoléon for your refreshment by the way. Yes, that suffices. In a bag, you know—and soon!"

Returning across the Vieux Port in the bateau mouche, Monsieur Peloux no longer shuddered in dread of crime to be committed—his shuddering was for accomplished crime. On his bald head, unheeded, the gushing tears of shame accumulated in pools.

When leaves of absence permitted him to make retirements to his coquette little estate at Les Martigues, the Major Gontard was as another Cincinnatus: with the minor differences that the lickerish cookings of the brave Marthe—his old femme de ménage: a veritable protagonist among cooks, even in Provence—checked him

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on the side of severe simplicity; that he would have welcomed with effusion lictors, or others, come to announce his advance to a regiment; and that he made no use whatever of a plow.

In the matter of the plow, he had his excuses. His two or three acres of land lay on a hillside banked in tiny terraces—quite unsuited to the use of that implement—and the whole of his agricultural energies were given to the cultivation of flowers. Among his flowers, intelligently assisted by old Michel, he worked with a zeal bred of his affection for them; and after his workings, when the cool of evening was come, smoked his pipe refreshingly while seated on the vine-bowered estrade before his trim villa on the crest of the slope: the while sniffing with a just interest at the fumes of old Marthe's cookings, and placidly delighting in the ever-new beauties of the sunsets above the distant mountains and their near-by reflected beauties in the waters of the Étang de Berre.

Save in his professional relations with recalcitrant inhabitants of Northern Africa, he was of a gentle nature, this amiable warrior: ever kindly, when kindness was deserved, in all his dealings with mankind. Equally, his benevolence was extended to the lower orders of animals—that it was understood, and recipro-

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cated, the willing jumping of the Shah de Perse to his friendly knee made manifest—and was exhibited in practical ways. Naturally, he was a liberal contributor to the funds of the Société protectrice des animaux; and, what was more to the purpose, it was his well-rooted habit to do such protecting as was necessary, on his own account, when he chanced upon any suffering creature in trouble or in pain.

Possessing these commendable characteristics, it follows that the doings of the Major Gontard in the railway station at Pas de Lanciers—on the day sequent to the day on which Monsieur Peloux was the promoter of a criminal conspiracy—could not have been other than they were. Equally does it follow that his doings produced the doings of the man with the bag.

Pas de Lanciers is the little station at which one changes trains in going from Marseille to Les Martigues. Descending from a first-class carriage, the Major Gontard awaited the Martigues train—his leave was for two days, and his thoughts were engaged pleasantly with the breakfast that old Marthe would have ready for him and with plans for his flowers. From a third-class carriage descended the man with the bag, who also awaited the Martigues train. Presently—the two happening to come together in their

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saunterings up and down the platform—the Major's interest was aroused by observing that within the bag went on a persistent wriggling; and his interest was quickened into characteristic action when he heard from its interior, faintly but quite distinctly, a very pitiful half-strangled little mew!

"In another moment," said the Major, addressing the man sharply, "that cat will be suffocated. Open the bag instantly and give it air!"

"Pardon, Monsieur," replied the man, starting guiltily. "This excellent cat is not suffocating. In the bag it breathes freely with all its lungs. It is a pet cat, having the habitude to travel in this manner; and, because it is of a friendly disposition, it is accustomed thus to make its cheerful little remarks." By way of comment upon this explanation, there came from the bag another half-strangled mew that was not at all suggestive of cheerfulness. It was a faint miserable mew—that told of cat despair!

At that juncture a down train came in on the other side of the platform, a train on its way to Marseille.

"Thou art a brute!" said the Major, tersely. "I shall not suffer thy cruelties to continue!" As he spoke, he snatched away the bag from its

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uneasy possessor and applied himself to untying its confining cord. Oppressed by the fear that goes with evil-doing, the man hesitated for a moment before attempting to retrieve what constructively was his property.

In that fateful moment the bag was opened, and a woebegone little black cat-head appeared; and then the whole of a delighted little black cat-body emerged—and cuddled with joy-purrs of recognition in its deliverer's arms! Within the sequent instant the recognition was mutual. "Thunder of guns!" cried the Major. "It is the Shah de Perse!"

Being thus caught red-handed, the hireling of Monsieur Peloux cowered. "Brigand!" continued the Major. "Thou hast ravished away this charming cat by the foulest of robberies. Thou art worse than the scum of Arab camp-followings. And if I had thee to myself, over there in the desert," he added grimly, "thou shouldst go the same way!"

All overawed by the Major's African attitude, the hireling took to whining. "Monsieur will believe me when I tell him that I am but an unhappy tool—I, an honest man whom a rich tempter, taking advantage of my unmerited poverty, has betrayed into crime. Monsieur himself shall judge me when I have told him all!"

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And then—with creditably imaginative variations on the theme of a hypothetical dying wife in combination with six supposititious starving children—the man came close enough to telling all to make clear that his backer in cat-stealing was Monsieur Peloux!

With a gasp of astonishment, the Major again took the word. “What matters it, animal, by whom thy crime was prompted? Thou art the perpetrator of it—and to thee comes punishment! Shackles and prisons are in store for thee! I shall—”

But what the Major Gontard had in mind to do toward assisting the march of retributive justice is immaterial—since he did not do it. Even as he spoke—in these terms of doom that qualifying conditions rendered doomless—the man suddenly dodged past him, bolted across the platform, jumped to the foot-board of a carriage of the just-starting train, cleverly bundled himself through an open window, and so was gone: leaving the Major standing lonely, with impotent rage filling his heart, and with the Shah de Perse all a purring cuddle in his arms!

Acting on a just impulse, the Major Gontard sped to the telegraph office. Two hours must pass before he could follow the miscreant; but the departed train ran express to Marseille, and

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telegraphic heading-off was possible. To his flowers, and to the romance of a breakfast that old Marthe by then was in the very act of preparing for him, his thoughts went in bitter relinquishment: but his purpose was stern! Plumping the Shah de Perse down anyway on the telegraph table, and seizing a pen fiercely, he began his writings. And then, of a sudden, an inspiration came to him that made him stop in his writings—and that changed his flames of anger into flames of joy.

His first act under the influence of this new and better emotion was to tear his half-finished despatch into fragments. His second act was to assuage the needs, physical and psychical, of the Shah de Perse—near to collapse for lack of food and drink, and his little cat feelings hurt by his brusque deposition on the telegraph table—by carrying him tenderly to the buffet; and there—to the impolitely over-obvious amusement of the buffettière—purchasing cream without stint for the allaying of his famishings. To his feasting the Shah de Perse went with the avid energy begotten of his bag-compelled long fast. Dipping his little red tongue deep into the saucer, he lapped with a vigor that all cream-splattered his little black nose. Yet his admirable little cat manners were not forgotten:

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even in the very thick of his eager lappings—pathetically eager, in view of the cause of them—he purred forth gratefully, with a gurgling chokiness, his earnest little cat thanks.

As the Major Gontard watched this pleasing spectacle his heart was all aglow within him and his face was of a radiance comparable only with that of an Easter-morning sun. To himself he was saying: “It is a dream that has come to me! With the disgraced enemy in retreat, and with the Shah de Perse for my banner, it is that I hold victoriously the whole universe in the hollow of my hand!”

While stopping appreciably short of claiming for himself a clutch upon the universe, Monsieur Peloux also had his satisfactions on the evening of the day that had witnessed the *enlèvement* of the Shah de Perse. By his own eyes he knew certainly that that iniquitous kidnapping of a virtuous cat had been effected. In the morning the hireling had brought to him in his private office the unfortunate Shah de Perse—all unhappily bagged, and even then giving vent to his pathetic complainings—and had exhibited him, as a *pièce justificatif*, when making his demand for railway fare and the promised extra napoléon. In the mid-afternoon the hireling had returned,

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with the satisfying announcement that all was accomplished: that he had carried the cat to Pas de Lanciers, of an adequate remoteness, and there had left him with a person in need of a cat who received him willingly. Being literally true, this statement had in it so convincing a ring of sincerity that Monsieur Peloux paid down in full the blood-money and dismissed his bravo with commendation. Thereafter, being alone, he rubbed his hands—gladly thinking of what was in the way to happen in sequence to the permanent removal of this cat stumbling-block from his path. Although professionally accustomed to consider the possibilities of permutation, the known fact that petards at times are retroactive did not present itself to his mind.

And yet—being only an essayist in crime, still unhardened—certain compunctions beset him as he approached himself, on the to-be eventful evening of that eventful day, to the door of Madame Jolicœur's modestly elegant dwelling on the Pavé d'Amour. In the back of his head were justly self-condemnatory thoughts, to the general effect that he was a blackguard and deserved to be kicked. In the dominant front of his head, however, were thoughts of a more agreeable sort: of how he would find Madame Jolicœur all torn and rent by the bitter sorrow

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of her bereavement; of how he would pour into her harried heart a flood of sympathy by which that injured organ would be soothed and mollified; of how she would be lured along gently to requite his tender condolence with a softening gratitude—that presently would merge easily into the yet softer phrase of love! It was a well-made programme, and it had its kernel of reason in his recognized ability to win bad causes—as that of the insurance solicitor—by emotional pleadings which in the same breath lured to lenience and made the intrinsic demerits of the cause obscure.

“Madame dines,” was the announcement that met Monsieur Peloux when, in response to his ring, Madame Jolicœur’s door was opened for him by a trim maid-servant. “But Madame already has continued so long her dining,” added the maid-servant, with a glint in her eyes that escaped his preoccupied attention, “that in but another instant must come the end. If M’sieu’ will have the amiability to await her in the salon, it will be for but a point of time!”

Between this maid-servant and Monsieur Peloux no love was lost. Instinctively he was aware of, and resented, her views—practically identical with those expressed by Madame

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Gauthier to Monsieur Fromagin—touching his deserts as compared with the deserts of the Major Gontard. Moreover, she had personal incentives to take her revenges. From Monsieur Peloux, her only vail had been a miserable two-franc Christmas box. From the Major, as from a perpetually verdant Christmas-tree, boxes of bonbons and five-franc pieces at all times descended upon her in showers.

Without perceiving the curious smile that accompanied this young person's curiously cordial invitation to enter, he accepted the invitation and was shown into the salon: where he seated himself—a left-handedness of which he would have been incapable had he been less perturbed—in Madame Jolicœur's own especial chair. An anatomical vagary of the Notary's meager person was the undue shortness of his body and the undue length of his legs. Because of this eccentricity of proportion, his bald head rose above the back of the chair to a height approximately identical with that of its normal occupant.

His waiting time—extending from its promised point to what seemed to him to be a whole geographical meridian—went slowly. To relieve it, he took a book from the table, and in a desultory manner turned the leaves. While thus perfunctorily engaged, he heard the clicking of an

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opening door, and then the sound of voices: of Madame Jolicœur's voice, and of a man's voice—which latter, coming nearer, he recognized beyond all doubting as the voice of the Major Gontard. Of other voices there was not a sound: whence the compromising fact was obvious that the two had gone through that long dinner together, and alone! Knowing, as he did, Madame Jolicœur's habitual disposition toward the convenances—willingly to be boiled in oil rather than in the smallest particular to abrade them—he perceived that only two explanations of the situation were possible: either she had lapsed of a sudden into madness; or—the thought was petrifying—the Major Gontard had won out in his French campaigning on his known conquering African lines. The cheerfully sane tone of the lady's voice forbade him to clutch at the poor solace to be found in the first alternative—and so forced him to accept the second. Yielding for a moment to his emotions, the death-whiteness of his bald head taking on a still deathlier pallor, Monsieur Peloux buried his face in his hands and groaned.

In that moment of his obscured perception a little black personage trotted into the salon on soundless paws. Quite possibly, in his then overwrought condition, had Monsieur Peloux

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seen this personage enter he would have shrieked—in the confident belief that before him was a cat ghost! Pointedly, it was not a ghost. It was the happy little Shah de Perse himself—all a-frisk with the joy of his blessed home-coming and very much alive! Knowing, as I do, many of the mysterious ways of little cat souls, I even venture to believe that his overbubbling gladness largely was due to his sympathetic perception of the gladness that his home-coming had brought to two human hearts.

Certainly, all through that long dinner the owners of those hearts had done their best, by their pettings and their pamperings of him, to make him a participant in their deep happiness; and he, gratefully respondent, had made his affectionate thankings by going through all of his repertory of tricks—with one exception—again and again. Naturally, his great trick, while unexhibited, repeatedly had been referred to. Blushing delightfully, Madame Jolicœur had told about the night-cap that was a necessary part of it; and had promised—blushing still more delightfully—that at sometime, in the very remote future, the Major should see it performed. For my own part, because of my knowledge of little cat souls, I am persuaded that the Shah de Perse, while missing the details

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of this love-laughing talk, did get into his head the general trend of it; and therefore did trot on in advance into the salon with his little cat mind full of the notion that Madame Jolicœur immediately would follow him—to seat herself, duly night-capped, book in hand, in signal for their game of surprises to begin.

Unconscious of the presence of the Shah de Perse, tortured by the gay tones of the approaching voices, clutching his book vengefully as though it were a throat, his bald head beaded with the sweat of agony and the pallor of it intensified by his poignant emotion, Monsieur Peloux sat rigid in Madame Jolicœur's chair!

"It is declared," said Monsieur Brisson, addressing himself to Madame Jouval, for whom he was in the act of preparing what was spoken of between them as "the tonic," a courteous euphuism, "that that villain Notary, aided by a bandit hired to his assistance, was engaged in administering poison to the cat; and that the brave animal, freeing itself from the bandit's holdings, tore to destruction the whole of his bald head—and then triumphantly escaped to its home!"

"A sight to see is that head of his!" replied Madame Jouval. "So swathed is it in bandages,

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that the turban of the Grand Turk is less!" Madame Jouval spoke in tones of satisfaction that were of reason—already she had held conferences with Madame Jolicœur in regard to the trousseau.

"And all," continued Monsieur Brisson, with rancor, "because of his jealousies of the cat's place in Madame Jolicœur's affections—the affections which he so hopelessly hoped, forgetful of his own repulsiveness, to win for himself!"

"Ah, she has done well, that dear lady," said Madame Jouval warmly. "As between the Notary—repulsive, as Monsieur justly terms him—and the charming Major, her instincts rightly have directed her. To her worthy cat, who aided in her choosing, she has reason to be grateful. Now her cruelly wounded heart will find solace. That she should wed again, and happily, was Heaven's will."

"It was the will of the baggage herself!" declared Monsieur Brisson with bitterness. "Hardly had she put on her travesty of a mourning than she began her oglings of whole armies of men!"

Aside from having confected with her own hands the mourning to which Monsieur Brisson referred so disparagingly, Madame Jouval was not one to hear calmly the ascription of the term baggage—the word has not lost in its native

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French, as it has lost in its naturalized English, its original epithetical intensity—to a patroness from whom she was in the very article of receiving an order for an exceptionally rich trousseau. Naturally, she bristled. “Monsieur must admit at least,” she said sharply, “that her oglings did not come in his direction”; and with an irritatingly smooth sweetness added: “As to the dealings of Monsieur Peloux with the cat, Monsieur doubtless speaks with an assured knowledge. Remembering, as we all do, the affair of the unhappy old woman, it is easy to perceive that to Monsieur, above all others, any one in need of poisonings would come!”

The thrust was so keen that for the moment Monsieur Brisson met it only with a savage glare. Then the bottle that he handed to Madame Jouval inspired him with an answer. “Madame is in error,” he said with politeness. “For poisons it is possible to go variously elsewhere—as, for example, to Madame’s tongue.” Had he stopped with that retort courteous, but also searching, he would have done well. He did ill by adding to it the retort brutal: “But that old women of necessity come to me for their hair-dyes is another matter. That much I grant to Madame with all good will.”

Admirably restraining herself, Madame Jouval

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replied in tones of sympathy: "Monsieur receives my commiserations in his misfortunes." Losing a large part of her restraint, she continued, her eyes glittering: "Yet Monsieur's temperament clearly is over-sanguine. It is not less than a miracle of absurdity that he imagined: that he, weighted down with his infamous murderings of scores of innocent old women, had even a chance the most meager of realizing his ridiculous aspirations to Madame Jolicœur's hand!" Snatching up her bottle and making for the door, without any restraint whatever she added: "Monsieur and his aspirations are a tragedy of stupidity—and equally are abounding in all the materials for a farce at the Palais de Cristal!"

Monsieur Brisson was cut off from opportunity to reply to this outburst by Madame Jouval's abrupt departure. His loss of opportunity had its advantages. An adequate reply to her discharge of such a volley of home truths would have been difficult to frame.

In the Vic bakery, between Madame Vic and Monsieur Fromagin, a discussion was in hand akin to that carried on between Monsieur Brisson and Madame Jouval—but marked with a somewhat nearer approach to accuracy in detail. Being sequent to the settlement of Monsieur

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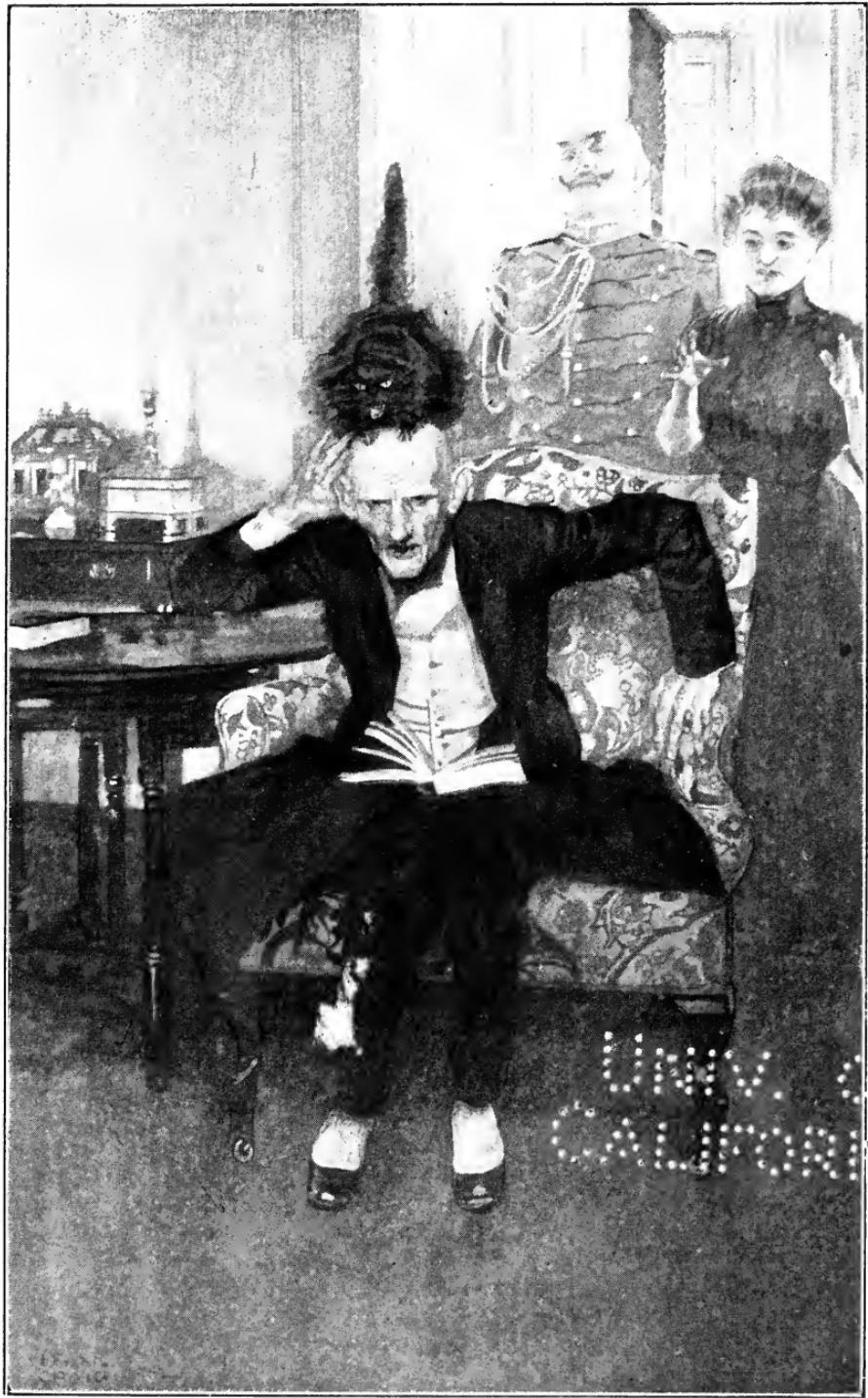
Fromagin's monthly bill—always a matter of nettling dispute—it naturally tended to develop its own asperities.

"They say," observed Monsieur Fromagin, "that the cat—it was among his many tricks—had the habitude to jump on Madame Jolicœur's head when, for that purpose, she covered it with a night-cap. The use of the cat's claws on such a covering, and, also, her hair being very abundant—"

"*Very abundant!*" interjected Madame Vic; and added: "She, she is of a richness to buy wigs by the scores!"

"It was his custom, I say," continued Monsieur Fromagin with insistence, "to steady himself after his leap by using lightly his claws. His illusion in regard to the bald head of the Notary, it would seem, led to the catastrophe. Using his claws at first lightly, according to his habit, he went on to use them with a truly savage energy—when he found him *lf as on ice* on that slippery eminence and verging to a fall."

"They say that his scalp was peeled away in strips and strings!" said Madame Vic. "And all the while that woman and that reprobate of a Major standing by in shrieks and roars of laughter—never raising a hand to save him from the beast's ferocities! The poor man has my



"HIS SCALP WAS PEELED AWAY IN STRIPS AND STRINGS!"

10. *Urtica dioica* L. (Urticaceae) - Common Nettle
Common Name: Nettle
Habitat: Roadsides, fields, pastures, thickets, open woods, stream banks.
Flowers: Small, greenish-yellow, bell-shaped flowers, arranged in whorls along the stem.
Leaves: Opposite, deeply lobed leaves with serrated edges, covered in small, hair-like structures called trichomes.
Stem: Stems are upright, hairy, and often purple at the base.
Fruit: Small, round, reddish-brown drupe-like fruits.

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sympathies. He, at least, in all his doings—I do not for a moment believe the story that he caused the cat to be stolen—observed rigidly the convenances: so recklessly shattered by Madame Jolicœur in her most compromising dinner with the Major alone!"

"But Madame forgets that their dinner was in celebration of their betrothal—following Madame Jolicœur's glad yielding, in just gratitude, when the Major heroically had rescued her deserving cat from the midst of its enemies and triumphantly had restored it to her arms."

"It is the man's part," responded Madame Vic, "to make the best of such matters. In the eyes of all right-minded women her conduct has been of a shamelessness from first to last: tossing and balancing the two of them for months upon months; luring them, and countless others with them, to her feet; declaring always that for her disgusting cat's sake she will have none of them; and ending by pretending brazenly that for her cat's sake she bestows herself—second-hand remnant that she is—on the handsomest man for his age, concerning his character it is well to be silent, that she could find for herself in all Marseille! On such actions, on such a woman, Monsieur, the saints in heaven look down with an agonized scorn!"

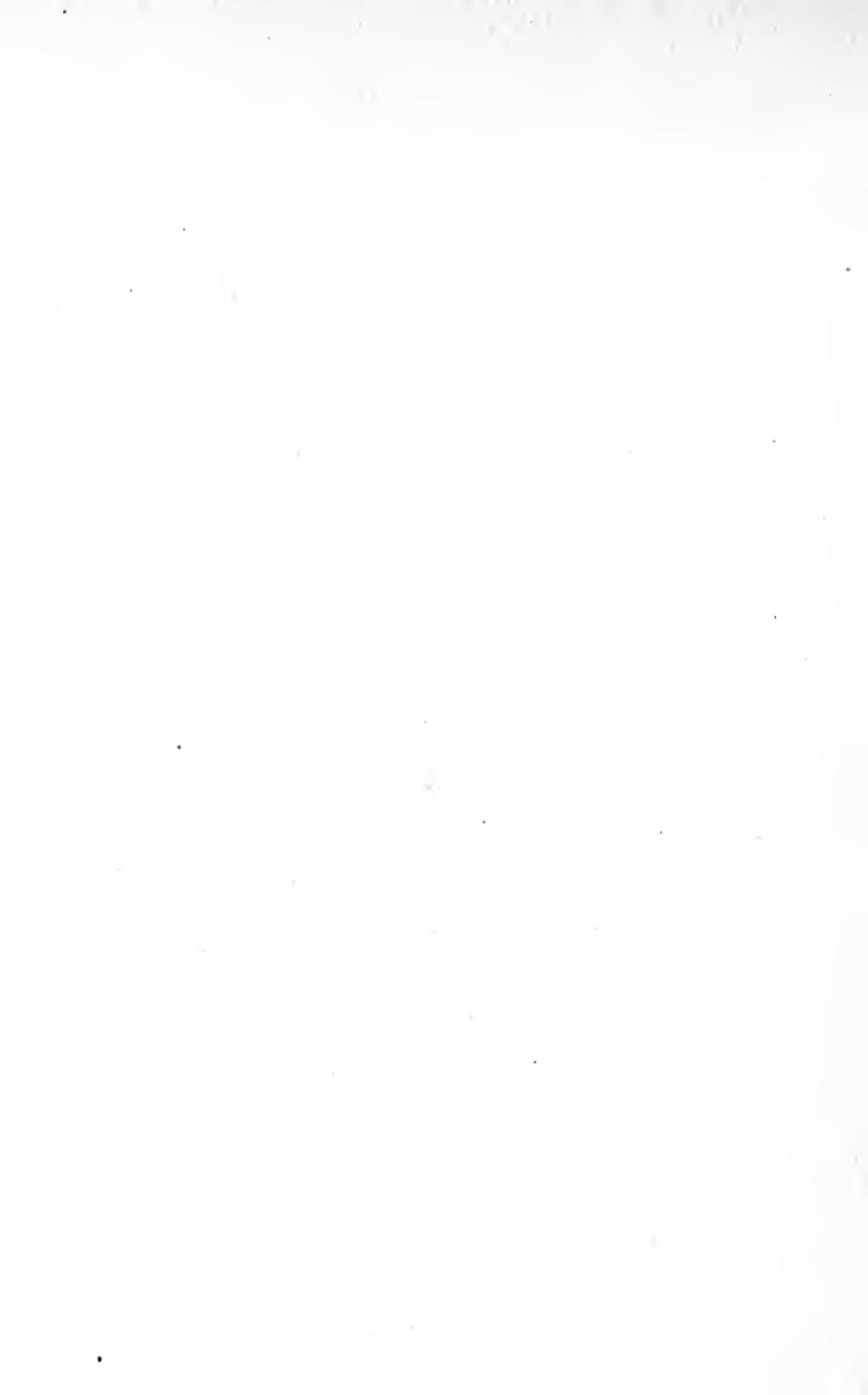
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"Only those of the saints, Madame," said Monsieur Fromagin, warmly taking up the cudgels for his best customer, "as in the matter of second marriages, prior to their arrival in heaven, have had regrettable experiences. Equally, I venture to assert, a like qualification applies to a like attitude on earth. That Madame has her prejudices, incident to her misfortunes, is known."

"That Monsieur has his brutalities, incident to his regrettable bad breeding, also is known. His present offensiveness, however, passes all limits. I request him to remove himself from my sight." Madame Vic spoke with dignity.

Speaking with less dignity, but with conviction—as Monsieur Fromagin left the bakery—she added: "Monsieur, effectively, is a camel! I bestow upon him my disdain!"

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C^{LAD}, as usual, in cotton tights and a slashed red velvet jacket, my friend Madame Galissard—known widely and favorably as *La femme géante de Languedoc*—loomed huge before the tent entrance. Beside her, as usual, the boy Jean beat the great drum. Above her, as usual, was a vividly painted canvas representing Monsieur Galissard standing with one foot upon the head of a prostrate tiger and with one hand grasping a rampant lion by the throat. Before her, as usual, was a little table bearing a tin box into which she clicked the prices of admission to the Grand Établissement Zoologique Alexandre Galissard: Premières, 1 fr. 50; Secondes, 1 fr.; Troisièmes, 0 fr. 50 centimes.

What with her great size, the generous cut of her red velvet jacket, and the surprising pervasiveness of her tights, Madame Galissard absolutely was the most striking feature of every fair on her circuit in the South of France.

“It is expected, Monsieur,” she explained to

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me at our first meeting, "that I thus present myself to the public. Throughout the whole of the Midi my legs have an honorable celebrity. They have received encomiums without number in the press. I can show you a cutting from *Le Petit Nimois* which declares that they resemble the Pillars of Hercules. Also, in *Le Petit Soleil* of Montpellier they have been described as a spectacle more petrifying than our entire collection of wild beasts. But I, I am not made vain. I value the admiration of the public only because it is for the good of our show. As is known, all the forces of my nature are given to making our show a success."

Over the heads of the crowd Madame Galissard beamed toward me a smile of greeting. When I had worked my way across the double stream of fair-goers upon the boulevard, she grasped me warmly by the hand.

"And the brave Alexandre?" I asked, when we had made our exchange of compliments. "He carries himself well, as always, that gallant subduer of ferocious beasts?"

Madame Galissard visibly quivered with emotion—as a mountain of jelly in an impossibly enormous bag. "What! Monsieur has not heard?" she exclaimed. "It is incredible! The whole of France was upheaved by that great

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catastrophe. The journals devoted columns to it. For months all the world lavished such admiration upon our Néron that had he been a human being his head would have been completely turned. Ah, my adored Alexandre would have rejoiced over the business that we did in the suite of the tragedy in which he took so lamentable a part! Many and many a time had he said to me, in the seasons when our business went badly: ‘My angel, were our Néron to eat a man all would go well with us—our fortunes would be made!’ It was as a prophet that he spoke, Monsieur—but, alas, when his prophecies came to be realized he had no share in them. It was my adored Alexandre himself who was eaten by our Néron—eaten to the very bones!”

Madame Galissard paused, seemingly to give me an opportunity to express my sympathy and my regret. That was not easy. A widow whose husband has been served *au naturel* to a lion is not met with every day. The situation was of an awkwardness out of the ordinary. My sympathy and my regret existed, but I was at a loss to exhibit them in suitable terms. While I hesitated, Madame Galissard gave a turn to the matter that set me at my ease. She was an artist, that fine giantess. Her pause had been solely for dramatic effect.

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"I could not, Monsieur," she continued, "bring myself really to blame our poor Néron. He was famishing. His need for food was imperative—and he did not understand, of course, that it was because of our necessary economies that he was almost starved. He acted upon the impulses of his nature. He even may have had the feeling, the good beast, that he was helping us in our trouble by making his own little economies in his own way. None the less, Monsieur, it was most discomposing, I assure you, all in a moment, at a single stroke, to lose my adored Alexandre, and in him the effective manager of our show. In my first agonies of desolation I did not remember my adored Alexandre's prophetic utterances—and so failed to realize that compensation awaited me for his loss. Monsieur, in that crisis of my fate it was my present husband who rescued me. The conduct of my present husband in that cataclysm of our fortunes was so magnificent that I simply was compelled to render to him all the affections of my heart!"

Madame Galissard again paused. Without attempting congratulations, I awaited her further words. Obviously, in the case of a narrative that moved so briskly, and that was charged with such conflicting emotions, it was safer to

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withhold comment until we were come safely to the end.

Taking again the word, the giantess continued: "Monsieur remembers, no doubt, my adored Alexandre's pupil—the worthy lad Victor Pezon? It was my adored Alexandre himself who perceived that excellent young man's possibilities and lavished upon him a father's care. He had in him, my adored Alexandre said from the very first, the making of a great dompteur—and in that, as in all things, my adored Alexandre was right. Monsieur, that brave young man it was who saved not only my life but the life of our show! In the very instant of the tragedy, perceiving that our black cloud had a silver lining, he was all fire and eagerness to make out of it a good account.

"It was at the performance of a Friday—and of a Friday that fell upon the thirteenth of the month—that my adored Alexandre perished. Will you believe it?—before ten o'clock the next morning my Victor had handbills everywhere (our stand that week was in Tarascon) proclaiming all that had passed in glowing words. Monsieur Manivet, the amiable editor of *Le Petit Éclair d'Avignon*, composed for us that heroic description of my adored Alexandre's destruction. Our gratitude to Monsieur Manivet is

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lasting. We have given him free admission to our exhibition for life.

“By consequence, on the Saturday evening our tent was filled to suffocation. Every other show in the fair was deserted. Even the flying horses were paralyzed. Even the montagnes russes stood still. And we, we turned hundreds—literally, hundreds—from our doors! It was as my adored Alexandre had said: every one was wild, demented, infuriated, to see the lion who had eaten a man! My tears flowed in torrents, Monsieur. I would have given continents could my adored Alexandre have been present that evening to enjoy the verifying of his own words. The bitterness of my sorrow was increased by the reflection that, in a way, he *was* present—but it was only as a part of our Néron that he was there!

“As to my Victor’s performance with Néron on that great occasion, it was majestic beyond words. Néron, to be sure, was a little *dégradé*. It was but natural. For a whole month, because of our bad business, we had been unable to give the brave beast a full meal. Being at last satisfied, he was dull. But my Victor’s energy more than made up for our Néron’s sluggishness. He was superb! Stopping only just short of being himself eaten, he re-enacted the whole of

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the tragedy—and with so furious a realism that almost a panic arose. I myself was a witness of that stupendous performance—which at once wrung all my heart-strings and filled me with a delighted surprise. I had not suspected—I am confident that even my adored Alexandre had not suspected—that such heroic possibilities resided in my Victor's soul. That evening my Victor wholly won my heart. On the ensuing morning, at the Mairie of Tarascon, I gladly bestowed upon him my hand.

"The relative promptness of our marriage, Monsieur, was of necessity. The lion legally was mine—and sacredly was mine because of his precious contents—but without a lion-tamer he was valueless. Similarly, the extraordinary genius of my Victor was valueless without a lion upon which to exercise it. The safeguarding of our common interests therefore required that we should continue together; and, that being the case, the convenances demanded that we should be married without needless delay. It was that which decided me. To the convenances, Monsieur, I am and always have been absolutely a slave. I am proud to add that those considerations of convenience and of propriety were reinforced by considerations of affection and of gratitude. That excellent young man deservedly

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had won my love and my esteem. Reasonably, however, my tender attachment to my adored Alexandre's memory would not suffer me to cast aside his name—by which, moreover, I was known professionally throughout our entire circuit of fairs. That sainted name I have retained. As Monsieur will observe upon examining our bills, I now am styled Madame Galissard-Pezon."

There was a finality about this statement which encouraged me to break my guarded silence. Properly mingling condolence with congratulation, I did my possible to express to that tempest-tossed giantess my felicitations and my regrets. "And now, no doubt," I said in conclusion, "the *Établissement Zoologique Galissard-Pezon* goes upon wheels."

The giantess shook her head sadly. "Monsieur is most amiable to be so interested in our welfare," she replied. "I wish that things were with us as he supposes. But it is not so. Already our great good-fortune is a thing of the past. No one understood better than my adored Alexandre the fickleness of the public. Yet in his words of prophecy he left that fickleness out of the account. For a time it seemed as though we were to grow rich beyond the dreams of avarice; as though my adored Alexandre, aided

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by our brave Néron, had coined himself into gold. At fair after fair, in the big towns and in the little towns, everywhere it was the same: all the world thronged to our show in a surging multitude. The enthusiasm of the public was without limit. Our Néron, my Victor, I—we became celebrities. In Marseille, Monsieur, we filled a month's engagement at the Palais de Cristal—positively, Monsieur, on my honor, a month's engagement at the Palais de Cristal! It was the crowning glory of my life. Always, from the moment that I came into the profession, the very zenith of my ambition was to appear at the Palais de Cristal—and there I was!

“Our success in that superb theater was without parallel. Figure to yourself the spectacle. In the center of the stage, enclosed in a grating of extra strength, was our Néron; with him, elegantly attired in velvets, was my Victor; in the front—a little to one side, that the view should remain unobscured—was I. My own dress, Monsieur, was of a simplicity, but of a richness. From head to foot I was in silk tights. Imagine my feelings! All my life silk tights had been my dream! In that superb dress, night after night, I stood on the stage of that magnificent palais de concert while my Victor glowingly re-enacted my adored Alexandre's tragedy;

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coming so close to the very edge of its ending that to me, to every one, it seemed that in another instant we should hear, we should behold, our Néron crunching his bones! The furor of the spectators was beyond words. They shrieked! They roared! As for me, Monsieur, my emotions were so poignant and so conflicting that my head swam. My devotion to the memory of my adored Alexandre, aroused to a burning intensity by that thrilling recreation of his last moments, dissolved me in tears. (Dressed as I was, Monsieur, it was impossible to carry a handkerchief. I could only brush away my tears with my hand.) But, also, being filled with a passionate admiration for my Victor's heroically realistic performance, I was stirred by an enthusiasm which made me forget my grief in the ennobling thought that I was at once the widow of a great artist—eaten, but immortal—and the wife of an even greater artist—equally immortal, but uneaten—who still was alive!

“Nor will I conceal from you, Monsieur, that—standing upon that exalting stage, where all my life I had longed to stand—wearing that rich dress, which all my life I had longed to wear—my artist soul was filled to brimming with an honorable pride. Behind me hung a black curtain. Against it my figure stood out in

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stately statuesque relief. I was as another Galathée—but heroic in my animated marble majesty beyond that heroine of the opera. No Galathée who ever walked the stage of France had legs like mine! The remainder of my person—it is always as the artist that I speak—was only less impressive. Above all, I had the true artist's satisfaction of knowing that the absolute simplicity of my costume made my appeal to the admiration of the public absolutely sincere. Monsieur, I conquered that admiration at a blow! I fairly divided with my noble Victor and our brave Néron the honors of that series of stupendous performances. More than that, the composer of the Palais de Cristal, by direction of the manager, embalmed my legs in song. The words and the medoly were caught up by every one on the very first evening. The song spread like wildfire. In an instant it was echoing in every quarter of Marseille. Monsieur, when I heard the whole populace of that great city chanting with one voice that song in my honor I knew that the supreme moment of my life had come!"

Madame Galissard-Pezon had given her history of her triumphs with a constantly increasing verve; but as she uttered those final words there was in her tone a triste undernote not to be

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mistaken. Obviously, the supreme moment of her life had come—and gone! It was done with a light touch, that revelation of disaster following upon victory. There was the subtle inflection of the voice. That was all—but it sufficed! Truly, she was an artist. Had not her great size barred to her the ordinary walks of the profession she would have been an ornament to the dramatic stage. But to her, and she knew it, theatrical success in the commonly accepted sense of the phrase was hopeless. Fancy the appearance on the boards, with a hero of the usual French dimensions, of a heroine 2 mètres 19 centimètres high! Of necessity, as she herself said, such a combination would produce a tumult, a revolt. In moments of emotion, that excellent giantess has confided to me that her mountainous proportions were at once her glory and her despair.

While we talked—or, rather, while the giantess talked and I listened—the boy Jean continued to beat the big drum with an honest vigor, and from time to time stray couples from the crowd clinked their money into the tin box and entered the tent. But so far from there being any popular excitement, any pressing forward of an enthusiastic throng eager to behold a thrilling spectacle, these stragglers were miserably few. It was as though the great Néron were the most

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commonplace of lions; as though he never had made a place for himself in fame and in history by eating his man.

"The performance goes to begin," the giantess said, sighing a little. "Monsieur will have the amiability to enter? Ah, Monsieur is most generous—a whole louis, and he refuses to take his change! He is altogether American! Had this niggard France the free hand of Monsieur's America our misfortunes would vanish as a bad dream! But it is not so. Monsieur has seen for himself how despicably few are our patrons. When he enters he will perceive that he alone has taken a première—has taken, indeed, with his superb American liberality, a whole row of premières; that the secondes make but a beggarly account; that the thin success left to us rests only with the troisièmes—and that even they give us their wretched ten sous so grudgingly that our tent is as empty as a forgotten island in a lonely sea!"

"Nothing, Monsieur, remains to us of our triumphs. In these black days we drink our wine double-watered, and we subsist upon crusts which we moisten with our tears. As for our unhappy beasts, they languish for sustenance. At the best, we can give them but a single meager meal a day. Our great Néron, whose appetite

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is a prodigy, exists always in torment. It is agonizing to hear his lamentations. He is as hollow, that unfortunate animal, as our big drum. With the white bear of the glacial seas it is the same. I weep as I behold him moping in his cage miserably. I am pierced with emotion as he turns toward me his beseeching eyes. His supplication is as plain as though it were expressed in words. And when I give him my sympathies, my compassions—it is all that I have to give him—he moans pitifully in bitterness of spirit, and turns again to the sucking of his paws. The case of our royal tiger of Bengal is yet more calamitous. That unfortunate creature knows not even the consolations of sucking his paws! The panther, the jaguar, the leopard visibly are pining away. Only the monkeys and the birds are a little less unhappy. Our ten-sous patrons find amusement in giving them some morsels and crumbs of food. Of them all, our anaconda alone—having had his half-yearly rabbit at the appointed season—as yet makes no complaint. But I have the terrible conviction that soon even the anaconda's turn must come! And to think that only a little year ago our worthy animals were filled every day to repletion—while we ourselves were feasting like princes, like emperors, as we went rolling in our

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gold! Monsieur, not a day passes that I do not find myself a dozen times saying—it is in my heart of an artist that I say it—my heart of a woman shudders at the thought: ‘Ah, if our Néron would but eat another man!’

“But enter, Monsieur—enter, and see for yourself the full measure of our despair. And after the performance—it ends quickly, my poor Victor having no heart to prolong it—Monsieur must honor us by drinking with us a glass of absinthe. It will be a delight to extend to Monsieur our little hospitalities—it will be as it was in the old days. He will find us in the rear of the tent. We have a little table there, beneath an enchanting tree. And Monsieur will find with us two old friends of his, the excellent M’sieu-Madame Rique. Monsieur remembers them—the proprietors of the wax-works? We continue, as always, to go the tour together. In good days and in bad days we have marched in company for a round dozen of years. In fair times and in foul times it is the same with them: they ring true always, they ring true as gold. They have cherished Monsieur delightedly in their memories. When they speak of him, as they do constantly, it is in warm words which come straight from their good hearts. To meet him again will arouse in those good hearts of theirs a tumult of joy.

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"Also, Monsieur will find with us my Victor's pupil and assistant, the worthy young Marius Bompuy. We, my Victor and I, are as his father and his mother. As I say to my Victor, my feelings toward that excellent youth are as they were toward himself in the happy days when my adored Alexandre still was alive. He goes to be a great dompteur—a subduer of animals whose fame will make a blaze in the whole world. My Victor takes pride in his astonishing abilities and encourages him to exercise himself in feats of daring. Between them—for all that Marius is of a modesty—there is the noble emulation of true artists. We feel profoundly that he has a great future; that he surely is destined to arrive.

"And now Monsieur must enter on the instant. I hear within my Victor's voice. His conférence upon the animals begins. It is inimitable, his conférence; Monsieur must not miss a word. Au revoir, Monsieur. We meet at the little table behind the tent when the représentation ends."

Only consideration for the feelings of my friends enabled me to sit out that sad performance: in which the spectators were without enthusiasm, and in which the performers were without heart. It went with a dull dreariness—and yet was thrilled with a touch of desperate animation by the feeling of hunger that was in

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the air. The monkeys chattered angrily. The royal tiger of Bengal lashed his tail against his lean sides and uttered dismal growls. The white bear of the glacial seas made the pitiful moaning noises of which the giantess had spoken; and betweenwhiles, with a tragic energy, sucked ravenously his paws. In the eyes of the great Néron there was so famished a look that I could not repress shudders of anxiety when my friend Victor thrust his head within the monster's jaws. I gave a sigh of relief when it came out again—and entire! The pupil, Marius Bompuy, a handsome young fellow of two or three and twenty, took but a minor part in the performance. His modesty was obvious. His spirit of emulation was less conspicuously displayed. That he left the more daring ventures to his master was undeniable; and it seemed to me that his master did not accept his disposition to self-effacement quite in good part. In this I may have been mistaken; but I certainly was not mistaken in regard to the look of relief upon my friend Victor's face when his act with the great Néron had come to a good end. That act was the culminating feature of the performance. Ten minutes later we all were gathered about the little table in the rear of the tent beneath the enchanting tree.

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Our talk, at first, went cheerily. Those honest souls seemed to be as glad to have me with them as I, on my side, was glad to be in their good company. M'sieu-Madame Rique greeted me with effusion; the lion-tamer with an equal cordiality, but with an air of weariness; the pupil, Marius Bompuy, being introduced to me, declared that he was honored by my acquaintance—and modestly disclaimed my rejoinder that I was honored by knowing a lion-tamer, already ranged in his profession, who surely would mount quickly the ladder of fame. In a moment we all were chattering away together like magpies in a hedge—all save our good Victor, whose weariness made him a little distract. That was only natural. To thrust one's head into the jaws of a lion, with the feeling that it may not come out again, no doubt puts an exhausting strain upon one's nerves.

On the little table stood a jug of water, a half-dozen tumblers, and a bottle of execrably bad absinthe. They had not touched this refreshment. With a charming politeness they had awaited my coming. The giantess herself filled my tumbler—towering above me, as she stood to perform that kindly office, like a tall tree. When the other tumblers had been filled we all rose and touched glasses above the table—it is

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the Provençal custom—and drank to each other with a great good-will. Victor, I observed, drained his tumbler to the last drop before he set it down. Yet the absinthe, all the more because of its wretched quality, was of a fiery strength. Before my own portion was half finished my head began to swim. Presumably, being strong enough to dare the jaws of a lion, Victor's head was strong enough equally to dare that dangerous absinthe. Certainly, he immediately refilled his glass. He performed this act with a gloomy aloofness, as though for another person; with a like air of detachment he rolled and lighted an extremely bad cigarette. As he smoked, sipping the while from his tumbler, his look of bodily weariness wore away a little; but the cheering of his spirit lagged appreciably behind the cheering of his flesh. In the hope of heartening him, I offered my congratulations upon his advance in his profession since our last meeting. Necessarily, I spoke guardedly. The regrettable accident which had promoted him from the rank of a lion-tamer's pupil to that of a master lion-tamer had its complications. To congratulate him in the presence of the lady whom that accident had widowed required both tact and delicacy—and all the more because the lady, ceasing with an amiable abruptness to be a

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disconsolate widow, had become his own consolate wife. It was not easy, but I think that I did succeed in expressing myself with an appropriate caution and also with an appropriate warmth. Unfortunately, my sympathetic endeavor was not crowned with success.

"Monsieur is very amiable," he replied dejectedly. "I am grateful to him for his goodwill. But to be a tamer of lions is not to rest upon a bed of roses." He paused, and then added with bitterness: "Rather is it to be mangled upon a bed of thorns!" Sighing heavily, he took a long draught of absinthe.

"My brave one!" exclaimed the giantess in tones of comforting. "Thou art the very first of living lion-tamers, and thou hast the admiration of the whole world. Let thy expansive soul be cheered by the tribute of homage that intelligent men and women pay thee all the evenings, and by the awed ecstasy that thou inspirlest in innocent children at the *représentation enfantine* on all the Sunday and Thursday afternoons."

The brave one did not respond to that encouraging exhortation. It is possible that the exclusion of deceased lion-tamers from the measure of his greatness may have touched a chord that jangled a little in his expansive soul.

"To be a lion-tamer, I repeat," he said

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gloomily, "is to court unhappiness. I may even say, more broadly, that only misery is the portion of all who associate their fortunes with the exhibition of ungrateful wild beasts. Search through the entire universe, and I defy you to find a profession so despicable in every way!" As he uttered these energetic words he glared fiercely at Monsieur Rique—as though that excellent man personally was responsible for the ingratitude of wild beasts—and brought his hand down upon the table with a bang.

Monsieur Rique, actual proprietor of the *Agrégation Incroyable de Figures de Cire*, accepted, but moodily, the challenge. "Thou hast no need to search through the universe to find a more despicable profession," he answered with a profound melancholy. "Thou hast only to cross the table that stands between us and thy search is made! Be thankful, my good Victor, that the lucky star of wild animals was regnant at thy nativity. To be born beneath the malignant star of wax-works is another thing!"

Monsieur Rique, in turn, sighed heavily. Madame Rique, I perceived, was disposed to sigh with him—but she checked her sigh bravely, and said with an admirable assumption of cheerfulness: "No, no, my Gaston, it is not so bad as that. The calamity that is upon us is

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but momentary—in this disgracing town inhabited only by camels who have no souls for art."

"Wax-works!" cried the lion-tamer, with an indignant scorn. "Wax-works! Do wax-works require at every instant of the day and night the attention that a mother lavishes upon her children? Do wax-works demand that they be taught to stand upon their hind legs?—to traverse the ring upon a bicycle?—to leap through flaming hoops?—to perform an endless variety of edifying feats? And above all, above all I ask, do wax-works *eat*? Rather should I ask, do they ravage, do they desolate, do they devour? Our lion, our great Néron, absorbs meat as the parched desert absorbs the rain. The white bear of the glacial seas is as a bottomless pit. The royal tiger, the panther, the jaguar, together cry out for the sustenance of a score of men. The monkeys and the birds are less disastrous only by comparison. Of them all, only the anaconda has a reasonable appetite. For that brave reptile a single rabbit suffices for half a year—and to those who desire to observe him in the edifying act of eating his rabbit we make an extra charge. Wax-works! Wax-works, indeed! To be the fortunate owner of wax-works is a lot that the angels of heaven may

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pine for—while to be the outraged proprietor of wild animals is to suffer a punishment more bitter than is inflicted upon the fiends of hell!"

"Calm thyself, my soul," the giantess put in soothingly. "Calm thyself, my Victor. As our good Marie here has said, this town of Saint-Césaire—it was a desolating fate that brought us here—is inhabited by human beings who in taste and in discernment are as the beasts that perish. Their meager natures are without aspirations. Art is a sealed book to them. For enlightenment they have no desire. To expect them to appreciate the exalting influences of wax-works is to expect swine to appreciate the beauty of pearls. Equally are they insensible to the ennobling influences of natural history. Creatures of such a sort have no wish to behold our unrivaled collection of wild animals, to listen to thy illuminating discourses upon the wonders of zoology, to see thy magnificent feats of daring—which elsewhere thrill more intelligent spectators with mingled admiration and alarm. From us, from our friends here, they withhold their wretched sous with an iron avarice—and with an infamous prodigality basely lavish fortunes upon humiliating cock-shys, and soulless flying-horses, and profligate montagnes russes.

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"But reassure thyself, my Victor. As our Marie has said, our calamity is but momentary. To-morrow we shake from off our feet the dust of this ungrateful Saint-Césaire and go on to Maussane. It is an honest little town. Our success there, a year ago, was superb. It will be again superb. Silver will flow in upon us in rivers. Our pockets will be bursting. We shall feast at the excellent little Hôtel du Petit Saint-Roch — thou rememberest the civet of hare that they gave us there?—and every one of our hungering animals shall have a full meal. Even our anaconda shall be fed. Now is not the season for his rabbit, but he shall have one. In our times of leanness the considerate abstinence of that amiable serpent is our only comfort. It is but just to him that in our times of fatness he also should have his little feast. Think, then, my Victor, of the good-fortune that is so near at hand. Think how merrily we shall eat together our civet, and how we shall drink with it a bottle of that good red wine which they make over there on the warm Southern declivities of the Alpilles!"

I am persuaded that in speaking with this resolute cheerfulness the good giantess consciously was permitting sanguine hope to get some stages in advance of reasonable probability.

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But upon the lion-tamer—whose gloom appreciably had been undermined by the fiery absinthe—the effect of her heartening deliverance was excellent.

“My angel!” he said warmly. “Thy great soul is in keeping with thy great body. On thy vast breast always I find comforting. Thy faith in our happy future raises me from despair. I rely upon thy glad prophecies. With thee, I am confident that the noble inhabitants of Maussane will atone to us for our disaster here in this ignoble Saint-Césaire. Again we shall march conquering. And perhaps—who knows?—perhaps again fortune may favor us by giving our Néron the opportunity to eat another man!”

As Monsieur Pezon spoke these final words—speaking them a little thickly; and letting them slip, perhaps, under the stimulus to sincerity supplied by the absinthe—I observed that his glance rested for an instant upon Monsieur Bompuy. What was more curious, I observed that simultaneously the glance of Monsieur Bompuy rested for an instant upon Monsieur Pezon. In those glances it seemed to me that I had the key to the spirit of noble emulation which the giantess had declared existed between the lion-tamer and his assistant—only I was inclined to believe that their noble emulation was

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of an inverted sort that led each of them to abandon to the other the honor of coming closest to Néron's jaws.

"Heart of my heart," the lion-tamer continued, "I shall drink one more glass of this excellent absinthe to thy health and to thy happiness. I can do no less, in recognition of thy comforting and sustaining love."

With a prompt decision, the giantess placed restrainingly her huge hand upon his upraised arm. "No, not now, my Victor, not now," she said in a tone at once persuasive and firm. "Already the afternoon draws to its ending. The représentation of the evening is not far off—and then thy nerves must be steady and thy head cool. Our Néron is in no mood to be trifled with, as thou knowest well."

"Absinthe admirably steadies the nerves and cools the brain," put in Monsieur Bompuy.

The lion-tamer had manifested a disposition to shake off his wife's great grasp and to carry out, in spite of her, his gallant project of drinking to her health and happiness. That his assistant's comments upon the steadyng and cooling properties of absinthe were intended to strengthen him in this intention was obvious. Oddly enough, they seemed to have upon him a directly contrary effect. Certainly, as those

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words were spoken, he yielded gracefully to the moral and material pressure put upon him and withdrew his outstretched hand.

"Thou art right, my angel," he said. "Thou art right, as always—and it suffices that I drink my toast to thee in my heart. Moreover, with Monsieur's permission, I shall go now to the fountain and soak this head of mine in the refreshing water, and then to repose myself before the représentation begins. And our Marius, here," he added dryly, "shall be free to steady his nerves and to cool his brain with all the absinthe that remains. I observe that his conduct is not in accord with his counsel: as yet he has not finished his single glass. Au revoir, à plaisir, Monsieur."

As the lion-tamer left us he shot another look from under his brows at his assistant. But his assistant was busied in rolling a cigarette at that moment and the look, if observed, was not returned.

Presently Monsieur Bompuy also left us. "The master sets me a good example," he said. "With Monsieur's permission I will follow it. I too will go to repose myself before the evening. In dealing with our Néron just now, as was observed by Madame, it is well to have a clear head and a steady hand. But, truly, Madame

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does the good beast an injustice. At his roots, even in his hunger, he is of an amiability toward those whom he knows to be his friends. He has the best heart, our great Néron, of any lion in the whole world." So speaking, Monsieur Bompuy made his bow to us and went his way.

A moment later M'sieu-Madame Rique rose from their seats. "It is time, Monsieur," Madame Rique explained, "that we prepare ourselves for the evening. Our good Victor said but now that wax figures, unlike wild animals, make no demands, require no services. He could not possibly have uttered words more extravagantly at variance with the miserable truth! Wax figures, Monsieur, are a constantly exhausting care. They compel us to a harassing vigilance that fills every instant of our lives. At this very moment the nose of Monsieur le Président Carnot—I observed it at the afternoon performance—is turned askew; and, also, the hand in which Santo holds his assassin dagger is cracking at the wrist. And yet those figures (it is our most pleasing group—Monsieur must do us the honor to behold it) are almost new! As to the older figures—the Holy Father, the great Emperor, Monsieur Thiers, the thrilling group of two Zulu savages slaying the Prince Imperial—they are crumbling into fragments

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in every hour of the day. We spend our entire existence, Monsieur, in making the necessary repairs. We breathe an atmosphere charged with the fumes of boiling wax through all the long evenings which succeed to our days of toil. The hours which should be free to us for healthful slumber are devoted to making, to mending, the costly garments in which our figures are attired. Wild animals, no doubt, do require a certain amount of attention—that much I admit freely. But, Monsieur, wild animals do not explode themselves into fragments with an imbecile malignity; they do not demand that heated wax be used without ceasing in their restoration; they are clad at all times, pleasingly and economically, in their own costless skins. No, no—in cheerful attendance upon wild animals one leads a life of unruffled gladness. It is as the hopeless slave of wax figures that one comes to know that which preys upon one's very vitals, which plunges one's whole being irrevocably into caverns of despair!"

Madame Rique was so overcome by her emotion that she left us without making her farewells. Monsieur Rique, only less moved, equally was incapable of words. Without speaking, he raised his hat to us. In his eyes I saw the glint of tears.

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"And yet, really, those good souls swim in what almost is a sea of happiness!" said the giantess, when we were left alone together. "For this past week, in this wretched town, it is true that their business has been bad. But at Uzès, in the week before, they made a little fortune; and even here, while they have nothing for the stocking, they have taken in enough silver to cover the cost of the stand. As to expenses—except now and then the cost of a new figure, and the cost of the wax which their mendings consume—they have none at all. By Madame Rique's own showing, they do everything for themselves. It is not with them as it is with us—to whom ceaselessly in all seasons a multitude of hungry animals comes clamoring for costly food. Monsieur may have observed upon our bills the announcement that 'the direction buys the old horses, asses, and mules, in good health, for the nourishment of the animals'—but Monsieur can have no conception of the prodigious outlay which those purchases compel when they are made in sufficient quantities for our needs. It is the soul-crushing thought of that hopelessly huge outlay—unavoidable if we would save our beasts from perishing—that weighs upon us always with a leaden heaviness, and that drives my brave

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Victor to his absinthe as an escape from his despair!"

The giantess paused and sighed deeply. With a pained earnestness she continued: "Monsieur, it is my Victor's increasing habit of drowning his despair in his absinthe that is ruining me professionally by eating the flesh from off my bones. In the past three months, because of my anxieties, I have lost no less than twenty kilos. In my best condition, I have weighed as much as two hundred and ninety kilos. Figure for yourself how long it will be, at this rate, before I shall wither wholly away! That, of course, is an extravagance. My stature of necessity will remain; but my figure, Monsieur, my figure, in which I have the honest pride of an artist, will be lost! Already, as a glance at these wrinklings of the cotton webbing reveals, my legs have shrunk calamitously—and with the shrinking of my legs, of necessity, there must be also a shrinking of my fame. Only the other day, at Uzés, I was forced to listen to a disastrous comparison that was instituted between my legs and those of a giantess lately come into the profession from the Department of the Loire. It was unfair in every particular, that comparison. It was malevolently false. I have seen the person with whom I was compared—she had the

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effrontery to make a stand at one of our fairs—and I know that all of my measurements exceed hers. None the less, those cruel words cut into me as knives—because they aroused in my soul the dread to which we artists ever are most sensitive: the dread that our popularity is on the wane. False though they were, there was the seed of truth in them. Even I cannot lose twenty kilos of flesh without losing also in the delicacy of my lines!

“And it is wholly, Monsieur, my anxieties for my Victor which are causing this destruction of my person. It is my dread of what may chance some day—when his absinthe has made him careless, and when our poor Néron is more than usually hungry—that is wasting me away. For the représentation enfantine, at three hours and a half, I have no fears. At that time in the day my Victor is of the correctness of an archbishop. But when it comes to the représentations of all the evenings, at eight hours, there is not one of them but causes me thrillings of dismay. When he said but now that the eating of another man by our Néron would restore our broken fortunes, I shuddered in my soul. He was repeating, all unconsciously, my adored Alexandre’s very words! That those words are true affords me no consolation. I am an artist,

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I am a woman—but above all, Monsieur, I am a wife! As an artist, I long for a repetition of those triumphs which bathed me in an exalting happiness. As a woman, I long to wear again those richly adorning silks in which the commanding lines of my figure so superbly were displayed. But as a wife, as a great-hearted wife, I have a natural hesitation about purchasing fresh triumphs and fresh adornment on the same terms.

“In this I am absolutely sincere. Monsieur saw for himself that I compelled my Victor to cut short his dangerous drinking. I give Monsieur my word that I put upon my Victor the like compulsion every day. Equally, my effort was the same in the case of my adored Alexandre. I struggled to check in him the habit that ended in his destruction. My struggle, as Monsieur knows, was unavailing. In the case of my Victor it again may be unavailing. Should he have a successor, and should his successor betray a like weakness, the struggle shall be resumed. Sacrificing the artist, crushing the woman, it is my high resolve to be only and always the loyal and the heroic wife—with whom self-interest is as nothing, with whom wifely duty is sacredly supreme. I desire, Monsieur, that that creditable fact shall be inscribed upon my tomb. All of

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my measurements, when in my best condition, and also my weight, will be stated in that inscription. I have spoken of the matter to my Victor, and also—as a safeguard against accidents—to his assistant, the excellent young Marius Bompuy. They have promised me that my wishes shall be regarded. It is arranged. That record of my measurements, and of my weight, will give to my monument a unique distinction. But when I think, Monsieur, of the record of my wifely devotion which will accompany it I am filled with a still nobler pride. I repeat, Monsieur, I am an artist, I am a woman—but I am a wife above all!"

As the giantess gave expression to this lofty sentiment her moral grandeur, matching to a hair her material grandeur, was magnificent. The Obelisk of Luxor could not have spoken with a more majestic bearing nor with a nobler air. But even while her words still thrilled me the look of animation faded from her expansive countenance, and again she uttered a heavy sigh.

"Monsieur," she continued, in a tone of sadness, "my enthusiasms carry me away and I forget myself. I have the little duties of a devoted wife to perform as well as the great duties. It is necessary now that I prepare the

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dinner. I must excuse myself that I may attend to that affair. My Victor is of an amiability, but he reasonably has his little access of feeling when his eating is delayed. This evening, thanks to Monsieur's American open hand, he shall fare well. But it will not be a feast, our little meal, and I do not venture to ask Monsieur to share it with us. Perhaps that happiness may be ours on another day: in the good times that will come for us when again our Néron— But no, that thought must be crushed within my breast! What I would say is, that perhaps we may have the pleasure of entertaining Monsieur at our humble board when once again we bask in fortune's smiles.

"And Monsieur is resolute to return to Nîmes by the train of six hours? It is deplorable! He would find the evening représentation of a brilliance. My Victor always then is at his best —perhaps because of the absinthe. Monsieur truly is resolute to go?"

Monsieur truly was resolute to go. Even to oblige that worthy giantess I was not prepared again to put my nerves on the rack by spending another hour among those starving animals; to see again, with my heart in my mouth, my friend Victor's head in the way to be cracked like a filbert in the great Néron's jaws.

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Two years later I was in Marseille. In the interval I had been in England and across to America. I had received letters from my friends the poets of the South—they are excellent correspondents—and even from some of the painters; but, naturally, no word had come to me from my artist friends of the road. Letter-writing was an accomplishment not in their line. On the occasions when I had happened to see a French newspaper I had examined every part of it with a painful care; and had taken a long breath when I found no record of a lion who had made his little economies—as the giantess had phrased it—by eating a man. That was something to the good. But it was so little that whenever my thoughts turned to my friend Victor I was preyed upon by a feeling of gloom.

In regard to the giantess my feelings were more complex. Her case and her Victor's case—in the deplorable event of Néron's practising upon the latter his little economies—differed radically. For Victor, obviously, the situation would have no compensations—save, perhaps, a merely momentary thrill of satisfaction in the thought that he was alleviating the necessities of a trusted friend. But for the giantess the translation of the lion-tamer into the lion would be far from meaning an absolutely black despair.

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As a devoted wife, that translation would have a dark side for her; but as an artist and as a woman—I had, in effect, her word for it—there would be a silver lining to her somber cloud. In the outcome of the matter it was impossible not to feel a lively interest. Really, it was more than anything else my desire to get news of those friends of mine that had brought me to Marseille.

“Monsieur, no doubt, dines as usual at Brégaillon’s and in the evening goes as usual to the Palais de Cristal?” It was Monsieur Chabassu, actual proprietor of the Grand Hôtel due Paradis, who thus addressed me. He is an old friend, the worthy Chabassu. He knows my ways.

“And at the Palais de Cristal,” Chabassu continued, “Monsieur will find an attraction over which, for the moment, all the town goes mad. It is a lion who has eaten in succession three of his keepers. The feeling is aroused, naturally, that at any moment he may eat his present keeper, the fourth. To be witness of that thrilling spectacle—painful, but most interesting—all the world attends. The Palais de Cristal is packed nightly to its very doors. Also, the widow of the three who have been eaten—she is the wife of the fourth, the one who now awaits the caprices of the lion’s appetite—is a part

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of the spectacle: a giantess, Monsieur, with legs so stupendous—they resemble the towers of a fortress—that the whole city is singing a song in which their immensity is described. Monsieur is most fortunate in coming to Marseille at this moment. I venture to advise that he makes sure of the purchase of his ticket before he dines. The demand for seats is enormous. The pressure of the throng, when the doors are opened, is like the surging of a stormy sea."

It was evident that Chabassu had given me—in broad outline, and with a not unnatural Provençal exaggeration—the very news that I was in search of. And it also was evident that I had only to go to the Palais de Cristal that evening to obtain the details—which would correct his florid estimate of the great Néron's man-eating exploits—from the giantess herself. Following his good advice, I hurried to secure my ticket; and then went on to my dinner at Brégaillon's: over which I lingered—over Monsieur Brégaillon's dinners it is impossible not to linger, even in seasons of such emotion as mine then was—until close upon the hour when, as I had been told at the box-office, the lion act would come on. Then I betook myself to my seat in the stalls.

The spectacle that I beheld was identical with

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that which the giantess so vividly had described to me two years earlier. It went with the same splendid furor. It glowed with the same soul-thrilling fire. In the center of the stage was a strong cage of iron containing the great Néron and his keeper—the latter clad brilliantly in crimson velvet embroidered with gold. At the side, in relief against a black curtain, was the giantess herself—again arrayed in the rich but simple silk costume that was so dear alike to her woman heart and to her artist soul. She had more than regained her lost twenty kilos. Her measurements, as she subsequently assured me, were greater than ever before. Standing there in strong relief against the black curtain, her appearance was of an impressiveness—of a geographical opulence that made her a veritable animated object-lesson in the use of the globes. The comparison that had been instituted between the nether portions of her person and the Pillars of Hercules seemed inadequate. Chabassu had come nearer to the truth with his fine simile of the towers of a château fort. Briefly, the giantess was superb!

The enthusiasm that she aroused among the spectators was stupendous. The very walls were shaken by the tempests of their cheers. Presently, with the orchestra leading, the whole

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house burst forth with the song in which, to use her own words, her legs had been embalmed. The tumult—the very spirit of Marseille was regnant—was frantic, delirious, overwhelming! I myself was carried away by it. In a moment I was shouting with the others the refrain of that embalming song. The whole building trembled as we roared out together:

“V’là des jambes! Colonnes d’Hercule!”

In the midst of that whirlwind of excitement the doings of the lion-tamer and the lion passed almost unnoticed. At least, they received but little attention after Néron’s obvious docility—when sufficiently fed, he was the most amiable of lions—had convinced the spectators that there was no likelihood, on that occasion, of his treating his keeper as the resisting piece of a table d’hôte.

Half an hour later, the act being ended, I was on my way to the green-room to offer my congratulations to the recipient of that magnificent ovation; and also to offer to her such expressions of sympathy as might seem to be called for when she had given me details of the tragedies which had occurred since our parting at Saint-Césaire.

I use the word tragedies, rather than tragedy,

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advisedly. The lion-tamer whom I had seen that evening in the cage with Néron was not Pezon, he was not even Bompuy; he was a person absolutely unknown to me. Still more ominous was the fact that on the bills of the performance the name of the giantess had been given as Madame Galissard - Pezon - Bompuy - Roustan. What had become, I asked myself with anxiety, of my friend Victor and of the youthful Marius? Who, I further asked myself, was Roustan? The painful conviction possessed me that I had done Chabassu an injustice in attributing exaggeration to his statement of Néron's achievements. It looked as though that energetic animal had been practising his little economies upon rather a startlingly large scale!

The giantess, clad elegantly but concisely in her sheening silk, welcomed me warmly. In her effusive friendliness she even honored me with an embrace. I am not a pygmy, but I was as an infant in her massively enfolding arms.

“Monsieur beholds me,” she exclaimed joyously, as she released me from her chaste embrace, “in the very moment of my greatest triumph! All of my previous triumphs together are as nothing to that which I now achieve. I am in raptures that Monsieur has returned at this auspicious instant to be a witness of the

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magnificent tribute of homage that I receive from all the world. And I rejoice that Monsieur also has seen the splendid act that is made with our brave Néron by my Félix. It is a name of fate, Monsieur. With my Félix, the utmost felicity of my life has arrived!"

"But Victor, but Marius, what—?" I began. And then checked myself abruptly, fearful that my question was ill-advised.

"Ah, my adored Victor! My adored Marius!" the giantess answered with feeling. "Alas, Monsieur, they went the way of my adored Alexandre! Our Néron ate them both!" The giantess sighed heavily. In her eyes were tears.

"Surely not at once?" I ventured to ask.

"No, no. Monsieur does the good beast injustice. He has a conscience, our Néron. It was under the stress of his necessities that he acted. Between his two meals there was an interval of a year. Our anaconda could not have been more temperate, more self-restrained.

"Naturally, as Monsieur will understand, when my adored Victor was eaten I married at once my adored Marius. As before, in a business way our marriage was necessary; as before, it was demanded imperatively by the convenances—as Monsieur knows, my existence is rooted in the convenances; and, also, as I desire to say

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frankly, the devotion of my adored Marius to my interests, and his still stronger devotion to my person, extorted from me a wealth of affection that came warmly from my heart. As on a previous occasion, my marriage was one of convenience and propriety; but equally, as on a previous occasion, it was a marriage of love. Unhappily, still as on a previous occasion, it was not destined to endure."

Tears flowed from the eyes of the giantess as she spoke. Her costume—as she once had explained to me—not permitting her to carry a handkerchief, she was compelled to brush them away with her hand. Controlling her emotion resolutely, she continued her narrative.

"After my adored Victor was lost to me, Monsieur, we had a season of splendid prosperity—my adored Marius and I. My adored Marius was admirable in his management of the affair; and our good friend Monsieur Manivet once more helped us in the making of a handbill which drew francs in streams from all pockets and tears in streams from all eyes. Again, Monsieur, a prodigious success attended everywhere upon us—but again, disastrously, our success faded slowly, until at last it withered utterly away! Once more our poor animals suffered agonies in their craving for the food that we could not give

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them; and once more our Néron, being enraged with hunger— Monsieur must pardon me. It is impossible that I continue. My emotion overcomes me. I can say only that once more our Néron—perhaps again the faithful animal had the feeling that he was making his little economies in our interest—was satisfied with an ample meal. When his meal was ended my adored Marius was *au troisième*—my Félix is the author of the *jeu d'esprit*—in our Néron's inside!

“That tragedy, Monsieur, happily is of the past. It has become a retrospect. More than a month has elapsed since the merging of my adored Marius in our Néron was effected. My sorrow must endure always; but its extreme poignancy, as is reasonable, begins to be alleviated by the soothing touch of time. In its first fierce moments, Monsieur, my grief was insupportable. My Félix—he was the assistant of my adored Marius—then was everything to me. But for his masterly management of the business side of that trying situation, but for the tender comforting which he bestowed upon me in my hours of agony, my affairs would have been involved in a hopeless ruin and I myself should have succumbed to a desolating despair. Stopping only for the single instant in which he

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strengthened me with his consolations, he left Saint-Remy—it was in Saint-Remy that my adored Marius was eaten—and flew on the wings of the wind to Marseille. In the course of that same single morning, such was his conquering energy, he was at my sorrowing side again—bringing me renewed happiness with the assurance that he had secured for us the splendid engagement that we are filling now. Nor was that all. Thinking of everything, and moving with the speed of a thunderbolt, he had visited Monsieur Samat in his editorial office; with the result that a spirituel account two columns long of our Néron's doings appeared the next morning in *Le Petit Marseillais*. It was exquisite, that article; and touching in the extreme. I wept over it in torrents. I wore it for days—when my dress was of a sort to permit me that luxury of grief—pinned close upon my faithful heart!

"Still with the same masterful energy, my Félix organized our immediate departure from Saint-Remy. We came away—on the train of two hours and twenty minutes—that very afternoon: leaving behind us, to follow later, all of our belongings save our Néron. That our Néron should accompany us was essential. He was a necessary part of our act. But even had he not been necessary to our act, Monsieur, I

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could not have brought myself to forsake that faithful animal: in whom was embodied, and therefore in a way not lost to me, so many of those whom so devotedly I had loved. That selfsame evening we all appeared together—I, my Félix, our Néron filled with his endearing memories—on this exalted and exalting stage. What my reception was, Monsieur, I do not need to tell you. Within the hour you have seen a repetition of it with your own eyes!" The giantess made this reference to her popular triumph with an air and with a gesture worthy of a queen.

"As you may imagine, Monsieur," she continued, "my gratitude to my Félix was without bounds. That he had secured our engagement here at the Palais de Cristal, to be sure, was not surprising. With a lion to offer who had eaten three men; with a giantess to offer—it is as an artist that I speak—who is without a rival in the profession, the engagement was an affair that made itself. But I felt that I owed him much for the splendid energy which he had expended in my service; and I felt that I owed him still more—I am proud, Monsieur, to tell you this—for the exquisite delicacy which had characterized his attitude toward myself. I am forced to confess to you that my adored Victor and my

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adored Marius had been less delicate. In avowing their affection for me they had acted with a closer approach to precipitance than accorded with the stricter niceties of good taste. My Félix, on the contrary, carried his observance of the niceties of good taste almost to an extreme. Not a word did he breathe to me of a feeling more than tenderly friendly until the business matter wholly was concluded and we were on our way to Marseille in the train!

"In the mean time, Monsieur, through those long hours, I had been thinking deeply—and all of my thinking, guided by my past experiences, led to the same result. As always, from the standpoint of my professional interests, I perceived the need of retaining with my lion a competent lion-tamer. As always, from the standpoint of the convenances—to the observance of which, as Monsieur knows, I devote myself with an unflinching exactitude—I perceived that only in one way could that need be satisfied with propriety. But also, Monsieur, I was swayed by a higher and a more tender sentiment. I was profoundly grateful to that fine-natured young man for his touching forbearance; for the restraint that he had put upon himself in hiding so resolutely the feeling which I knew was in his heart. For the adequate expression of my

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gratitude—as for the safeguarding of my interests, as for the observance of the convenances—again I perceived that only one course was open to me. Being conscious, Monsieur, that my adored Marius, that my adored Victor, would approve my action—each of them, in turn, had given to it what I may term his visée—I took that course. When at last my Félix overcame his delicate reserve and opened his heart to me—we had been traveling for more than an hour, we had left Arles behind us, before he ventured to speak—I frankly and gladly bestowed myself upon that worthy young man. He had earned my gift. It was deserved. On the following morning, Monsieur, our marriage was solemnized at the Mairie in Marseille.

“And so it is, Monsieur, that you now behold me not in sorrow, as at our last meeting, but on the very crest of a mountainous wave of joy. You observe how I am dressed—once more in silks of the richest. You saw me but a moment ago as a queen among my devoted subjects—receiving the tempests of their applause. You know that my adored Félix fills and satisfies my heart. Two years ago, Monsieur, I told you that the great triumph of my life had come and had gone. I was mistaken. I am in the midst of the great triumph of my life at this very hour!

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“But it must not be, Monsieur, that you misunderstand me; that you imagine me to be, in my sublime present, unfaithful to my exalted past. In my soul still are cherished the sainted memories of those who, in turn, were all in all to me: my three adored husbands—whom I loved, serially, with a supreme affection and served with an exhaustless care. I was their devoted wife, Monsieur. In saying that, I say all! And having held toward them that sacred relation—Monsieur will remember what I have said to him in regard to the sanctity of wifely duty—my chaste love for their memories will endure to the ultimate moment of my earthly days. I have endeavored delicately to indicate my continued devotion to all of their memories by continuing to call myself—as may be seen by a reference to the bills—by all of their names. It has its inconveniences, that arrangement—but with me, Monsieur, inconveniences are as nothing when the sacred requirements of wifely duty are to be fulfilled. I have told my Félix that his name also—should fate have farther changes in store for me—equally shall be continued upon the list. It is with pleasure that I have given him that tender assurance. Should the occasion arise, my promise to him shall be kept. My word has passed, and my loyal

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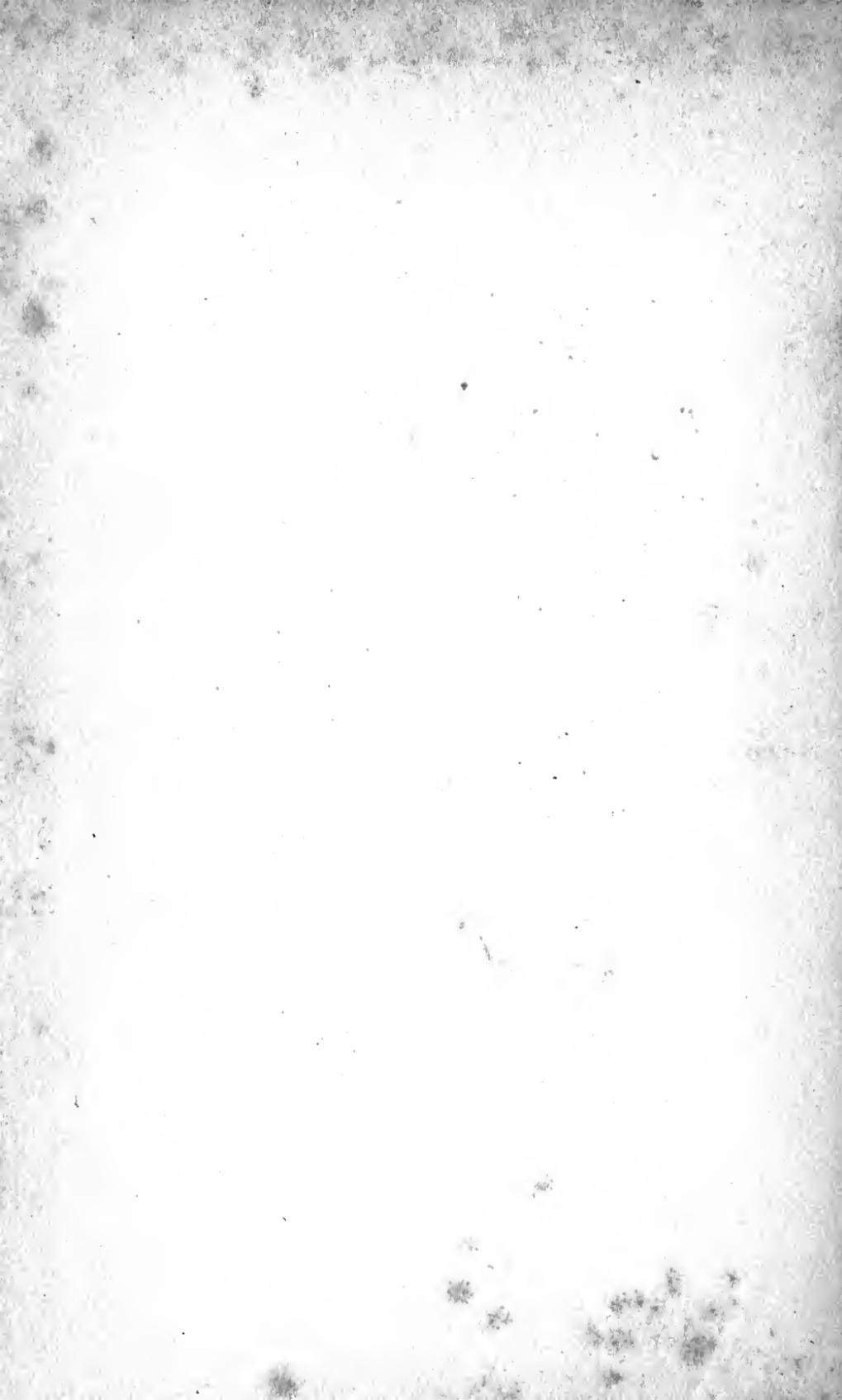
resolve is taken: the name of Roustan, Monsieur, shall not be forgotten—even though its immediate owner, by the force of some regrettable accident, should go to complete in the interior of our Néron what for me would be a peerless but desolating partie carrée.

“As to my feelings toward our Néron, Monsieur, they are not easy of expression. When I consider all calmly, I find—I cannot help it—that those feelings are confused. At times I remember with gratitude that to him I owe the gain of three dear ones upon whom I have lavished my devoted wifely love. At other times, equally, I remember that to him I owe a precisely corresponding loss—and with that thought comes the unavoidable reflection that the good beast, even though his motives may have been excellent, pushed the making of his little economies to an extreme. Yet again, looking at the matter in still another light, I am conscious that but for his impulsively energetic operations I never should have achieved the series of splendid successes which have made me a celebrity with a world-wide fame. With the good and the evil so nicely balanced, Monsieur, it is difficult, it is excessively difficult, to come to a just settlement of the account.

“But in one way, Monsieur, my feeling toward

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our Néron is without painful complications: he is, and the thought endears him to me beyond expression, the substantial link that unites my happiness of the present with my happiness of the past. When I think of him in that way I cannot withhold from him my affections. Forgetting his misdirected energies, forgetting his impulsive errors, I remember only that that faithful animal is at once the incarnation and the sarcophagus of all—of all save my adored Félix—that I most have loved: of my adored Marius, of my adored Victor, of my adored Alexandre!"



Janvier, T.A.

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